Academic freedom in Sweden

Government Commission on Higher Education Institutions' Efforts to Promote and Protect Academic Freedom

Content

Abbreviations/Glossary

AFI: Academic Freedom Index

AI: Artificial Intelligence

ALLEA: All European Academies

ARRA: The Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment

CoARA: Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

Ethical Review Act: The Act concerning the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460)

Emeritus: Professor (male) who leaves their permanent position upon reaching retirement age

FL: Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900)

GDPR: General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679

HF: Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

HL: Higher Education Act (1992:1434)

HR: Human Resources

JK: Chancellor of Justice

JO: Parliamentary Ombudsmen, also known as the Justice Ombudsman

KI: Karolinska Institute

LGO: Act on Responsibility for Good Research Practice and Examination of Research Misconduct (2019:504)

Multivariate: Analysis dealing with more than one variable at a time

NPM: New Public Management

OH: Overhead

Prop.: Government Bill

RF: The Instrument of Government

SCB: Statistics Sweden

SFS: Swedish National Union of Students

SLU: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

SUHF: Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions

SULF: Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers

SÄPO: Swedish Security Service

TF: Freedom of the Press Act (1949:105)

UKÄ: Swedish Higher Education Authority

Vinnova: Swedish Innovation Agency

VR: Swedish Research Council

YGL: Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression (1991:1469)

Preface

Academic freedom in Sweden is governed by the Higher Education Act. Since July 1, 2021, a key principle of this regulation has been the promotion and protection of academic freedom. The preparatory work for this provision clarifies that it encompasses individual academic freedom within the activities of higher education institutions, including both research and education. Higher education institutions are required to actively implement the Higher Education Act in practice. Academic leaders are responsible for prioritizing academic freedom and fostering a culture that supports the free pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.

In January 2023, the Swedish government tasked the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) with gaining a deeper understanding of how universities and higher education institutions promote and protect academic freedom in line with the provisions of the Higher Education Act.

The report includes four case studies, a survey distributed to teachers, researchers, and doctoral students, and a referral sent to higher education institutions with questions regarding their efforts to promote and protect academic freedom.

This is an English translation of the original Swedish report, done by using the generative AI chatbot ChatGPT in December 2024. The translated version of the report is slightly shorter than the original. The original report includes examples of the legal framework surrounding academic freedom and its relationship with other legislation, as well as a literature review of academic freedom in countries with educational systems similar to Sweden's. There is a summary of the literature review in the end av the report.

Caroline Tovatt, project manager, and Martin Bergman, senior analyst

About Swedish Higher Education Authority

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) is an independent government agency. The operations of the Swedish Higher Education Authority are laid down in the instructions issued by the Government. These instructions define our areas of responsibility and the tasks to be undertaken. However, UKÄ takes decisions and applies the law independently.

Each year the Government issues a public service agreement that specifies the targets and the funding for these operations. The Government also assigns on-going tasks during the year, these are referred to as government assignments.

Our three main areas
- Quality assurance of higher education and research, and appraisal of the degree-awarding powers of public-sector higher education institutions.
- Legal supervision of higher education.
- Monitoring efficiency, follow-up and horizon scanning as well as responsibility for statistics in the higher education sector.

In addition to this, UKÄ is the hosting authority for The Higher Education Appeals Board and The Higher Education Expulsions Board.

More information: https://www.uka.se/swedish-higher-education-authority

Summary

According to Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the Higher Education Act, the activities of universities and higher education institutions must, as a general principle, promote and protect academic freedom. This provision regulates individual academic freedom, focusing on the relationship between the institution and the individual rather than between the state and the institution.

The Swedish government commissioned Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) to conduct case studies to provide an in-depth understanding of how universities and higher education institutions promote and protect academic freedom in accordance with the provisions of the Higher Education Act. The assignment also included examining the efforts to encourages a culture that allows the free search for, and free dissemination of knowledge. The assignment involved compiling information on institutional efforts to promote and protect academic freedom and this culture. The compilation was to include a national picture and an international perspective. This report constitutes the final presentation of the assignment.

The report includes four case studies, a survey distributed to teachers, researchers, and doctoral students, and a referral sent to institutions with questions regarding their efforts to promote academic freedom. An international perspective, focusing on the EU and countries with similar education systems, was also compiled. The aim of these investigations is to provide a deeper understanding of how universities and higher education institutions work to promote and protect academic freedom as required by the Higher Education Act, as well as their effort to encourages a culture that allows the free search for, and free dissemination of knowledge.

From an international perspective, Sweden generally has a high level of academic freedom, particularly concerning the aspects addressed in this assignment – individual academic freedom in the relationship between individuals and institutions. The findings reveal, however, that academic freedom in Sweden faces certain challenges today, indicating room for further improvement in promoting and safeguarding these principles.

Since 2006, global academic freedom has declined according to the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), partly due to population growth in countries with lower levels of academic freedom. Sweden ranks among the countries with the highest AFI scores and has not experienced significant declines in academic freedom during this period. Academic freedom is a current and important issue in all countries included in the international perspective. Although different aspects are emphasized in

various countries, academic freedom is clearly a shared concern, with recurring themes observed across nations.

One way most higher education institutions affirm their commitment to academic freedom is by joining organizations or endorsing recommendations, as well as through overarching policy documents. Many institutions emphasize the importance of decentralized organization with collegial governance and decision-making processes as central to promoting and safeguarding academic freedom. Collegial forums or advisory bodies for academic freedom are also highlighted by several institutions. Some institutions stress the importance of involving students in discussions about academic freedom.

UKÄ notes a lack of broad dialogue between teachers and students about seminar culture and the norms for discussion and mutual respect in educational settings. Institutions report difficulty addressing external challenges to academic freedom compared to internal ones.

Almost all teachers, researchers, and doctoral students at Swedish higher education institutions believe academic freedom is a critical prerequisite for their work, yet many feel they lack sufficient knowledge on the topic. Half of the respondents believe academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently under threat, although fewer – about one-third – feel that their individual academic freedom is being challenged. The most frequently cited challenges lie outside the scope of this assignment and concern political influence and research funding. The most commonly cited internal challenge is homogeneity and conformity within academic environments.

Few individuals seek support from their institution when their academic freedom is challenged. Of those who do, only 17 percent feel they received adequate support. Three-quarters of respondents who experienced threats to their academic freedom reported altering their behavior as a result.

The survey asked respondents about specific situations they had encountered and whether they felt these situations challenged their academic freedom. The most common experience related to research was a perception of homogenized research and academic discussion due to informal networks and friendships. In education, the most frequent issue was students pressuring for course content to be removed or added. UKÄ finds a lack of consensus on whether these situations constitute challenges to academic freedom.

Four case studies were conducted to illustrate how academic freedom can be promoted or protected in education and research when faced with internal or external threats. These cases are not exhaustive but serve as individual examples.

Open and free discussions, where researchers, teachers, doctoral students, and students engage with each other's arguments substantively, is fundamental to the activities of universities and higher education institutions. However, many in academia today perceive academic freedom as broader than what is regulated in the Higher Education Act. Discussions about academic freedom need to be conducted more frequently within universities and higher education institutions and with other stakeholders.

UKÄ hopes this report will serve as a foundation for constructive and objective discussions on this critical issue for universities, higher education institutions, and society as a whole.

Introduction

On January 19, 2023, the Swedish Government commissioned the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) to conduct case studies aimed at providing a deeper understanding of how universities and university colleges work to promote and safeguard academic freedom in accordance with the provisions of Chapter 1, Section 6 of the Higher Education Act (1992:1434); HL, and to foster a culture that allows the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge. The assignment includes compiling institutions' efforts to uphold academic freedom and the aforementioned culture. This compilation should include a national picture and an international perspective.

The preparatory work for Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the Higher Education Act clarifies that it is individual academic freedom within higher education, i.e., in both research and education, that is protected by this provision. This legislation does not cover the relationship between the state and the institutions; rather, it governs the relationship between institutions and individuals. This report focuses on institutions' efforts to promote and protect academic freedom within the existing legal framework.

The aim of this report is to provide an in-depth understanding of how universities and university colleges work to promote and safeguard academic freedom, as per the Higher Education Act, and to foster a culture that allows the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge. UKÄ hopes that this report will serve as a foundation for a constructive and factual discussion on this important issue for higher education institutions and society. Shared learning can strengthen institutions' preparedness for often complex situations that arise when academic freedom is challenged.

Implementation of the Assignment

Pilot Study

Work began in the spring of 2023 with a review of relevant legislation, reports, and studies, as well as discussions with various stakeholders in the higher education sector. Dialogues were held with the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) expert groups on analysis and employer issues, the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers (SULF), including its doctoral student association, and the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS). The purpose of these dialogues was to gain insight into how the higher

education sector defines academic freedom and their experiences of how it is challenged or may be at risk.

Exploratory interviews were also conducted with teachers, researchers, and academic leaders. The goal was to gain a broader understanding of what academic freedom means at institutions and to identify the participants' experiences of how academic freedom is challenged or may be at risk. The interviews also aimed to gather suggestions for incidents and situations to include in the case studies for this assignment.

The findings from the pilot study guided the design and implementation of the assignment as a whole.

Case Studies

The government's assignment included conducting case studies to provide a deeper understanding of institutions' efforts to promote and safeguard academic freedom. The purpose of the case studies is to provide examples and illustrate how universities promote and protect academic freedom when various aspects of it are challenged or at risk of being challenged. The aspects of academic freedom explored in the case studies also appear in the national picture. The results of the case studies are not intended to exhaustively describe all aspects of how academic freedom may be challenged but serve as individual examples. The case studies contribute to the overall national picture.

National Picture

The assignment also included producing a national picture of institutions' efforts to promote and safeguard academic freedom and a culture that allows the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge. To achieve this overview, various data sources were collected, covering legal regulations, experiences from institutional leadership, and the perspectives of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students. The case studies provide depth through practical examples.

Legal Regulations

Free search for and free dissemination of knowledge are central to the operations of universities and university colleges. On July 1, 2021, academic freedom was explicitly regulated in the Higher Education Act. The section on legal regulations presents the legal framework for academic freedom and its relationship to other legislation.

Institutional Perspective

Institutional leadership holds the primary responsibility for academic freedom. To get an overview of how institutions work with academic freedom, UKÄ sent a referral with questions to all public universities

and the five largest private education providers in fall 2023. These questions addressed each institution's efforts to foster a culture that allows the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge and the frequency with which academic freedom is challenged at the institution. The responses were summarized to provide an understanding of the commonness of internal and external challenges to academic freedom and how institutions handle these situations. Internal challenges involve events and situations that arise within the institution, while external challenges come from actors outside the institution, such as harassment, threats, or social media campaigns. Both internal and external challenges can threaten or restrict individual academic freedom. This part of the assignment aims to contribute to a knowledge base, also includes examples of situations where academic freedom has been challenged and the lessons institutions have learned from these experiences.

Experiences of Teachers, Researchers, and Doctoral Students

Academic freedom within higher education covers both research and teaching. To capture employees' perspectives on institutional efforts to promote and protect academic freedom, a survey was distributed to 10,000 teachers, researchers, and doctoral students. In addition to questions about institutional support structures, the academic culture within research and education, and other structured questions, the survey included open-ended questions allowing respondents to share their personal experiences.

International Perspective

The assignment also included compiling an international perspective. To provide context for academic freedom in Sweden relative to other countries, the Academic Freedom Index, compiled by Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) at the University of Gothenburg, was used. A literature review offers an overview of academic freedom in the USA and Europe and then delves into countries with educational systems that share similarities with the Swedish system. This literature review was conducted through a consultancy assignment with Sweco.

Report Structure

The report begins with the national picture. It opens with a chapter on the legal framework for academic freedom and its relationship with other legislation, followed by a chapter presenting the institutions' perspectives on academic freedom, with descriptions of their efforts to promote and protect it. Next, there is a chapter reporting the survey results from teachers, researchers, and doctoral students at Swedish universities and universities colleges regarding their views on academic freedom. This is followed by the case studies, which provide examples of different aspects of academic freedom and what happens when it is

challenged or at risk. The international perspective then presents an assessment of Sweden's academic freedom compared to other parts of the world, as well as a literature review on challenges and solutions to academic freedom in other countries. The report concludes with a discussion focusing on some of the report's main findings.

Implementation

Pilot study

- Legal regulations
- Reports and studies
- Dialogue meetings
- Interviews

Legal framework

HEI perspectives

Survey

Case studies

National picture

Literature review – Nordic countries, EU and the US

Academic Freedom Index – Sweden in an international comparison

International perspective

Report
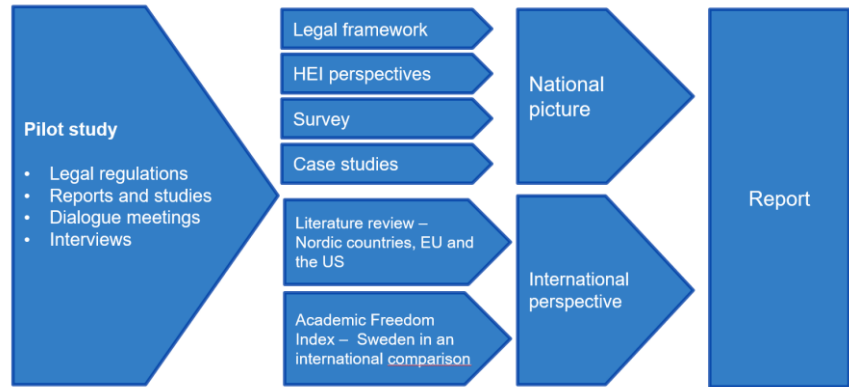
The Legal Framework of Academic Freedom and Its Relationship to Other Legislation

The UKÄ's governmental commission is based on the provision concerning academic freedom in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), HL, along with associated preparatory statements. In this chapter, UKÄ provides an account of the regulation and the preparatory statements.

The assignment includes both public higher education institutions and private (non-state) educational providers. This chapter, therefore, offers an overview of the extent to which public universities and private educational providers are bound by the Higher Education Act's provision on academic freedom. The chapter also addresses the provision's relationship to other legislation, highlighting the scope and limitations of academic freedom. The chapter concludes with a presentation of various oversight decisions, which illustrate how the regulation of academic freedom interacts with other legal provisions in practice.

The primary aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the boundaries of academic freedom within the context of the Higher Education Act.

Legislation on Academic Freedom

Public universities and university colleges must follow the rules in the Higher Education Act (HL) and associated regulations, particularly the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100), (HF). Additionally, they are subject to a range of other legislative provisions governing public authorities, such as the Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900), FL.

Private educational providers are not public authorities and thus are not subject to as many regulations as public institutions. This section explains the provision on academic freedom in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the Higher Education Act and the extent to which public institutions and private educational providers are bound by it.

Public Institutions

The Higher Education Act contains provisions for universities and university colleges under state ownership (Chapter 1, Section 1, first paragraph, HL). For these institutions, academic freedom is regulated in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph, HL, which states that as a general principle, academic freedom should be promoted and protected.

This provision entered into force on July 1, 2021. The preparatory work for this provision specifies that it covers individual academic freedom within the activities of higher education institutions, i.e., both in research and education. Therefore, this assignment does not govern the relationship between the state and the institutions but rather the relationship between institutions and individuals.

Furthermore, Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL is intended as a principle provision, which means that institutions need to work actively to implement it in practice. Institutional leadership is responsible for prioritizing academic freedom and promoting a culture that allows free search and knowledge dissemination.

The preparatory statements also note that free search and knowledge dissemination may sometimes involve posing controversial questions and presenting unexpected results, which can entail risks and, at worst, increase exposure to hate and threats. Given the contributions of research and higher education to knowledge and societal development, it is essential that fear of threats or harassment does not influence the topics pursued for knowledge or dissemination. This, according to the preparatory statements, emphasizes institutional leadership's responsibility for ensuring a safe work environment and combating hate, threats, violence, and harassment within the sector.

For education, Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL means that teaching and other learning situations should promote an open environment where diverse ideas and perspectives can be discussed, and unexpected – even controversial – results can be highlighted. The preparatory statements clarify that both teachers and students share a mutual responsibility to foster and protect such a culture.

Private Educational Providers

A private individual or legal entity may only issue degrees specified in Appendix 2 of the Higher Education Ordinance with government authorization. These educational providers are referred to as private educational providers. Authorization for private providers to issue degrees is regulated in The Degree Authorization Act. Although private providers are not subject to as many regulations as public institutions, the preparatory statements for the academic freedom provision in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL specify that it applies to

private providers authorized to issue degrees under The Degree Authorization Act.

The Degree Authorization Act states that authorization to issue a degree may be granted to a private provider only if the education meets the requirements of Section 2 (Section 1, first paragraph of The Degree Authorization Act). According to Section 2 of The Degree Authorization Act, education must be based on scientific or artistic foundations and proven experience and must meet other requirements established for higher education under Chapter 1 of the Higher Education Act.

Consequently, the provision on academic freedom in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL applies to private providers with degree authorization for education and research conducted in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 1 of the HL.

This means that the requirements in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL do not necessarily apply to private providers in relation to research conducted outside the scope of such education as specified in Section 2 of The Degree Authorization Act.

Although individual education providers are not fully covered by the provision on academic freedom in Chapter 1, Section 6 of the Higher Education Act (HL), the institutions included by UKÄ in the government assignment have nevertheless committed to adhering to rules regarding academic freedom throughout their operations in various ways.

Relationship to Other Legislation

Academic freedom is not unconditional. The preparatory statements for Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL states that academic freedom must always be exercised within the existing legal framework and based on the applicable values.

In addition to the general regulatory framework for public agencies, laws and guidelines concerning ethics and values apply specifically to public higher education institutions. For example, these include the Act on the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460), and the Act on Responsibility for Good Research Practice and the Examination of Research Misconduct (2019:504), as well as the public service values for state employees, which are based on the principles of democracy, legality, objectivity, freedom of expression, respect, efficiency, and service. These principles are based on the provisions of the Instrument of Government and the Administrative Procedure Act (2017:900), FL.

The provisions of the FL do not apply to private educational providers. However, private providers with degree authorization must adhere to the principles of objectivity and impartiality, as stated in Chapter 1, Section 9 of the Instrument of Government, which requires that courts,

administrative authorities, and other public administration officials respect equality before the law and maintain impartiality and objectivity.

Private providers are also subject to the Act on Ethical Review and the Act on Good Research Practice.

Employers' Responsibility for the Work Environment

The preparatory work for Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph of the HL states that since research and higher education contribute to knowledge and societal development, it is crucial that fear of threats and harassment does not affect the topics pursued for knowledge or dissemination. This, according to the preparatory statements, emphasizes the responsibility of institutional leadership for the work environment and combating hate, threats, violence, and harassment within the sector.

Swedish Work Environment Act

According to the Work Environment Act, the employer must take all necessary measures to prevent employees from being exposed to ill health or accidents (Chapter 3, Section 2). The Act stipulates that universities, in their capacity as employers, must conduct systematic work environment management. This entails systematically planning, directing, and monitoring operations in a manner that ensures the work environment meets the prescribed standards for a good working environment.

This includes investigating workplace injuries, continuously assessing risks in the operations, and taking the necessary measures in response. The employer must document the work environment and related efforts to the extent required by the operations. Action plans must also be established (cf. Chapter 3, Section 2a).

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's Regulations on Violence and Threats in the Work Environment

In AFS 1993:2, the Swedish Work Environment Authority has regulations regarding violence and threats in the work environment. According to these regulations, the employer must investigate the risks of violence or threats of violence that may exist in the workplace and take actions prompted by the investigation (§2). Furthermore, the work should be organized in a way that, as far as possible, prevents the risk of violence or threats of violence (§3). Incidents involving violence or threats of violence should be documented and investigated (§10). Employees who have been exposed to violence or threats of violence should promptly receive help and support to prevent or mitigate both physical and psychological harm. Employers must have specific procedures in place for this (§11).

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's Regulations on Systematic Work Environment Management

The Swedish Work Environment Authority has issued regulations on systematic work environment management (AFS 2001:1). According to these regulations, systematic work environment management should be an integral part of daily operations. It should include all physical, psychological, and social conditions that impact the work environment (§3). According to the regulations, there must be a Work Environment Act describing how work conditions in the employer's operation should be arranged to prevent illness and achieve a satisfactory work environment. There should also be procedures outlining how systematic work environment management is to be conducted (§4).

Furthermore, the employer must assign tasks within the organization in such a way that one or more managers, supervisors, or other employees are responsible for ensuring that risks in the workplace are prevented and a satisfactory work environment is achieved. According to the regulations, the employer must ensure that those assigned these responsibilities are sufficient in number and have the authority and resources required. The employer must also ensure that they have adequate knowledge and competence (cf. §6).

If an employee experiences health issues at work or if a serious incident occurs, the employer must investigate the causes to prevent future health risks (§9). The employer must implement the necessary measures immediately or as soon as practically possible to prevent health risks at work. The employer must also take other measures needed to achieve a satisfactory work environment. The actions taken should be monitored (cf. §10). The employer must annually review the systematic work environment management, and if it has not worked well, it should be improved (§11).

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's Regulations on Organizational and Social Work Environment

The Swedish Work Environment Authority's regulations on the organizational and social work environment and general advice on the application of the regulations (AFS 2015:4) clarify what employers and employees should do as part of the systematic work environment management that all employers are responsible for implementing. According to the regulations, the employer must ensure that managers and supervisors, among other things, have knowledge of how to prevent and handle abusive behavior. The employer must ensure that there are conditions to apply this knowledge in practice (§6).

The employer must also set goals for the organizational and social work environment. These goals should aim to promote health and increase the organization's ability to counteract health issues (§7). The employer should have a clear strategy for working toward these goals. For

successful efforts toward these goals, it is essential that they are supported by top management and other parts of the organization. The goals should be based on the work environment policy and be consistent with it.

According to AFS 2015:4, the employer must also make it clear that abusive behavior is not accepted in the organization. The employer must take actions to prevent work environment conditions that could give rise to abusive behavior (§13). This clarification is suitably made in writing in a policy.

The regulations also require that the employer ensures there are procedures for handling abusive behavior. The employer should make these procedures known to all employees (§14).

UKÄ's Observations

The boundary between academic freedom and other regulations can be complex and sometimes difficult to assess. Academic freedom can both be supported and restricted by other legislation. Support may involve that abusive behavior should not be tolerated in matters such as the choice of research topics, research methods, or the presentation of controversial results. However, scientific integrity must also be upheld, and rules on research misconduct must not be violated. Academic freedom must be exercised within the existing legal framework.

In some cases, issues primarily concerning other legislation, such as freedom of expression, may also involve aspects of academic freedom. This means that questions of academic freedom can arise, to varying degrees, in situations where it may not initially seem apparent. For example, an institution must safeguard academic freedom without simultaneously restricting the freedom of expression of other employees. At the same time, the institution is responsible for maintaining a good work environment.

Perspectives on Academic Freedom from Institutions

In the previous chapter, the legal regulation of academic freedom was outlined. UKÄ noted that the boundary between academic freedom and other regulations could be complex and sometimes difficult to assess. In the government's commission, UKÄ is tasked with summarizing the institutions' efforts to promote and protect academic freedom and a culture that allows free search for and free dissemination of knowledge. UKÄ, therefore, asked institutions to answer questions about their work to promote and protect academic freedom and to describe the lessons learned when academic freedom has been challenged.

All public institutions and the five largest private education providers were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Describe the institution's own work to promote and protect a culture that allows free search for and free dissemination of knowledge, in accordance with the provision in the Higher Education Act.

2. How common is it for academic freedom at the institution to be challenged?

   a) Internally, meaning in situations arising within the institution?

   b) Externally, meaning through influence by actors outside the institution?

3. Provide examples of when academic freedom at the institution has been challenged internally and externally. Describe concretely how the institution acted to protect academic freedom in those situations and what lessons were learned.

4. Does the institution have any additional comments regarding academic freedom?

All institutions except one responded to the questions.

This section is a summary of extensive material. Therefore, it has been necessary to limit what is reported. Some responses that fall outside the definition of academic freedom in Chapter 1, §6 of the Higher Education Act, and thus outside UKÄ's assignment, have not been included in the summary. This applies primarily to institutions' responses to question 4, which largely concern issues related to political and economic governance, institutional autonomy, research funding, and requests for legislative changes.

The preparatory statements indicate that academic freedom in Chapter 1, §6, first paragraph of the Higher Education Act should always be exercised within the legal framework and based on applicable values. The summary of the institutions' responses does not include what they reported about their efforts to ensure compliance with these legal frameworks. Instead, the summary focuses on the institutions' own work to promote and protect academic freedom.

Below, UKÄ presents questions 1–3 at the beginning of each section, followed by a summary of the responses received. The reporting of responses begins at an overarching level and then proceeds further down the institution's organizational structure.

The chapter concludes with UKÄ's observations based on the institutions' responses to the questions.

Question 1. Institutions' Own Work to Promote and Protect Academic Freedom

UKÄ has asked institutions to describe their work in promoting and safeguarding a culture that allows for free search for and free dissemination of knowledge, in accordance with the provision in the Higher Education Act. This section presents the responses from the institutions.

Affiliations with International Organizations or Recommendations Supporting Academic Freedom

Several institutions report that they are affiliated with various organizations, policy documents, or agreements or that they have implemented different recommendations aimed at protecting academic freedom. The stances these organizations take or the recommendations they set forth are reflected to varying extents in the institutions' overarching visions, strategies, and goals. This section provides an overview of these organizations and recommendations.

Magna Charta Universitatum

The Magna Charta Universitatum is a document signed in 1988 by 388 university Presidents from institutions across Europe[1]. It outlines fundamental principles on which universities should be based, including academic freedom. The Magna Charta states, among other things:[2]

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[1] https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum
[2] https://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/mcu2020

"As they create and disseminate knowledge, universities question dogmas and established doctrines and encourage critical thinking in all students and scholars. Academic freedom is their lifeblood; open enquiry and dialogue their nourishment.

In Sweden, 20 institutions are signatories of the Magna Charta Universitatum.[3]

European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers

On March 11, 2005, the European Commission adopted a recommendation on the *European Charter for Researchers* and the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers*.[4] Several institutions report that they have joined the Charter and Code.

The European Charter for Researchers consists of general principles and requirements concerning the roles, responsibilities, and rights of researchers, their employers, and funders. The Charter aims to ensure that relationships between researchers and employers or funders promote both high-quality outcomes in the creation, transfer, sharing, and dissemination of knowledge and technological development, as well as the career development of researchers. The Charter provides a framework for researchers, employers, and funders, encouraging them to act responsibly and professionally in their working environment and to recognize each other as professionals.[5]

The Charter is directed at all researchers within the EU at all career stages and covers all research fields in both the public and private sectors, regardless of type of position or employment, the employer's association form, or the type of organization or institution where the work is conducted. It considers researchers' many different roles, acknowledging that they not only conduct research or development activities but also engage in tasks related to supervision, mentoring, management, or administration.[6]

Among the general principles and requirements that apply to researchers, research freedom is mentioned.

"Researchers should focus their research on the betterment of humanity and on advancing the frontiers of science. They should have freedom of thought and expression and be free to determine

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[3] https://magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/signatory-universities
[4] 2005/251/EC, OJ L 75, 22.3.2005, p. 67–77 – https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2005/251/oj
[5] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SV/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32005H0251
[6] Ibid.

methods for solving problems in accordance with established ethical principles and accepted ethical practices."

When it comes to the dissemination and utilization of results, as well as social responsibility, the following is stated, among other things:

> "In accordance with their agreements, all researchers should ensure that the results of their research are disseminated and utilized, for example, by being conveyed to other research contexts, or, when appropriate, used commercially."

> […]

> "Researchers should ensure that their research becomes known to the broader public in a way that can be understood by non-specialists, thereby enhancing public understanding of science."

Among the general principles and requirements for employers, non-discrimination is included, meaning that employers should not discriminate against researchers on the basis of gender, age, ethnic, national, or social origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, language, disability, political opinion, or social or economic conditions.[7]

Employers are also advised to follow the principles set out in the *Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers* when appointing or recruiting researchers. The Code specifies general principles and requirements for recruitment, including that employers should use "open, positive, and effective recruitment procedures that allow transparency and international comparability."

The European Commission recognizes institutions that make progress in aligning their HR policies with the 40 principles in the Charter and Code with the *HR Excellence in Research Award*, based on a tailored action plan or HR strategy.

To date, 17 Swedish institutions have been awarded the HR Excellence in Research Award.[8]

All European Academies (ALLEA)

Some institutions refer in their responses to *All European Academies* (ALLEA) and the *European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity*. ALLEA is a European federation representing over 50 academies from approximately 40 EU and non-EU countries. ALLEA's mission includes representing its members on the European and international stages,

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[7] Ibid.
[8] https://www.euraxess.se/sweden/hrs4r-sweden

promoting science as a global public good, and facilitating scientific cooperation across borders and disciplines.[9]

According to its website, ALLEA also seeks to ensure that the public and decision-makers are aware of the importance of protecting academic freedom. ALLEA acts on behalf of its members to oppose unjustified violations and intervenes with various measures, including mediation, statements, and open letters, to support academic institutions that have been threatened in recent years.[10]

ALLEA has published the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.

The Code states that good research practices include creating a research environment free from undue pressure, allowing researchers to work independently and according to principles of good research practice. It further specifies that good research practices involve institutions actively supporting researchers who face threats.[11]

Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)

Some institutions report that they have joined the *Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment* (CoARA). CoARA is a global coalition that includes research funding and performing organizations. Membership in the organization requires signing the *Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment* (ARRA).[12]

Signatories of the ARRA commit to a shared vision that the assessment of research, researchers, and research organizations recognizes the diverse outputs, practices, and activities that maximize the quality and impact of research. The coalition serves as a platform for joint critical reflection, exchange of good practices, and mutual learning while fully respecting the autonomy of organizations.[13]

One of the principles that ARRA signatories agree to uphold is safeguarding the freedom of scientific research. This is achieved by implementing assessment frameworks that do not restrict researchers in the questions they pursue, the methods they use, or their theoretical approaches.[14]

In Sweden, 16 institutions have signed ARRA and joined CoARA.[15]

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[9] https://allea.org/allea-in-brief/
[10] https://allea.org/academic-freedom/
[11] ALLEA (2023) The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity – Revised Edition 2023, Berlin, DOI 10.26356/ECOC, s. 6.
[12] https://coara.eu/agreement/faq/
[13] https://coara.eu/agreement/the-agreement-full-text/
[14] https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf
[15] https://coara.eu/coalition/membership

Institutions' Visions, Strategies, and Goals

Most institutions report having some form of documented vision, strategy, or goals aimed at protecting academic freedom. An example is Uppsala University's operational plan, which addresses academic freedom as follows:

"The university safeguards the free pursuit of knowledge in education and research and upholds the integrity, diversity, and quality of science. The independence of the university is a cornerstone of democracy and an essential condition for individuals' freedom to choose education and for research's ability to contribute to sustainable solutions for society's challenges. The university seeks to contribute to an open, knowledge-based public debate where freedom of expression and human rights are central. Academic freedom, collegial governance, and student influence are fundamental principles at the university."

Some institutions also highlight the importance of academic debate. The University of Borås has established goals for an attractive institution. The goals state, among other things, that at an attractive institution, different opinions and competencies are respected, and there is a capacity to engage in constructive, fact-based discussions.

Other institutions specifically emphasize collegiality in their governance documents. Malmö University's operational plan states:

"Academic values should permeate all education and research at the university. By academic values, we mean academic freedom, academic integrity, and academic quality. Principles of collegiality should characterize the university culture, where knowledge development and knowledge assessment are the focus. Decisions and the preparation of issues for decision should, in line with collegial ideals, be based on knowledge, meaning those in different boards and groups are appointed based on their particular expertise and knowledge."

Core Values and Employee Policies

Several institutions report having their own core values that include promoting academic freedom. Many of these are based on the Magna Charta Universitatum.

Chalmers University of Technology has indicated that the institution has a Code of Conduct. This code is based on the institution's core values, which are openness, inclusion, respect, diversity, and quality. According to the institution, the Code of Conduct should characterize all work and serves as a tool to clarify expectations on each individual to take responsibility for the community and that no individual should be mistreated. The Code of Conduct is signed by each new employee and is followed up in the annual employee review.

Uppsala University reports that an employee policy has been developed as part of its work environment efforts. The employee policy highlights the university's shared values by concretizing and clarifying the employees' responsibilities, attitudes, and expected behavior toward each other. The employee policy states:

"Academic freedom and collegial governance are fundamental principles at Uppsala University. In academic life, with our seminar culture, differences of opinion on factual matters are a natural and desirable part, characterized by an open, objective, and critical discussion. The discussion climate should be constructive, and the approach should be respectful and professional."

According to Uppsala University, there is also support material available for group discussions based on the employee policy, which includes dilemma exercises.

Academic Freedom in Governance Documents on Education and Research

At several institutions, academic freedom is also reflected in overarching governance documents for education and research.

Regarding education, Karolinska Institutet (KI) states that the institution's pedagogical foundation is based on the university's core values. One of the perspectives cited is psychological safety. To provide the best conditions for learning and the development of academic teaching, it is crucial to establish a safe and inclusive working and learning environment. The university describes that in a psychologically safe learning environment, both students and teachers feel that they can present ideas, ask questions, voice concerns, or admit mistakes without fear of punishment, ridicule, or humiliation. This is summarized as an environment perceived by participants as secure and safe for interpersonal risk-taking.

Regarding research, Halmstad University has a detailed policy on research freedom. The policy outlines not only what the institution considers essential for promoting and protecting a culture of free search and dissemination of knowledge but also what research freedom means for those not involved in research. It states that individuals not contributing to research outcomes – researchers, teachers, managers, or administrative staff – have no right to restrict research freedom.

The university's policy further develops the role of managers in relation to researchers within the organization as follows:

"A manager has the responsibility to lead and allocate work, which includes distributing time and resources for research. At the same time, it is essential that the allocation of resources does not result in such detailed control of research that it risks limiting research freedom. What

constitutes legitimate control and what does not cannot be generally determined and depends on the circumstances."

The policy also addresses research freedom in relation to research funding applications. It states that research freedom does not imply that every researcher has the right to submit an external funding application to a funder. Furthermore, it specifies that there are situations where the university needs to prioritize among applications to a particular funder.

Regarding Donations

With regard to receiving external funds through donations, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) has stated that it has strengthened and systematized its efforts in this area in recent years. The institution has established guidelines for receiving donations. According to SLU, the institution's level of external funding is comparatively high. The institution believes that well-considered work with donations can strengthen the university's freedom to fund research in priority areas.

SLU states that, in connection with donations, the institution's mission statement must always form the basis for decisions on whether a donation can be accepted. According to the institution, a donation must not have a purpose or come from a source that could be at odds with SLU's mission. SLU asserts that equal importance is placed on the institution's academic autonomy; no donation may be subject to conditions that could affect SLU's academic freedom, integrity, independence, or ability to carry out its mission correctly and impartially.

Strategic Leadership and Governance at Institutions

Collegial Governance

Many institutions indicate that they have a decentralized organization with collegial governance and decision-making processes, which they see as central to promoting and safeguarding academic freedom.

For example, Lund University believes that academic freedom is based on institutions themselves, within their collegial circles, defining what activities should be pursued and how they should be implemented and communicated. The university emphasizes that academic freedom is therefore intertwined with collegiality and collegial governance. The fundamental idea, according to the institution, is that the collective competence of multiple people can lead to better decisions than an individual's decisions alone. The university considers collegiality as much a working method and culture as it is a form of governance.

The University of Gothenburg highlights a strong tradition of collegial leadership at the departmental level, where all roles rotate, ensuring that

no individual or small group remains in a position of power permanently. According to the university, the collegial and professional assessment of both research and education, without political interference, is a central principle to protect academic freedom, the free search of knowledge, and institutional autonomy. The university notes that departments operate with a high degree of autonomy and that research and educational strategies are primarily developed at the department level.

Umeå University states that the university and faculty leadership set the strategic direction but aim to avoid detailed management and quantified targets. The institution believes this approach creates space for collegial bodies' responsibility and allows departments and units to protect and develop individual teachers' freedom to make independent choices of teaching methods, research questions, and methods.

Funding

Many institutions also discuss the management of resource allocation and access to funding, addressing the various priorities that must be made due to the research funding system.

Lund University states that, as external funds are increasingly allocated to specific areas, this affects researchers' freedom and ability to choose their research areas and subjects. At the same time, the university's core funding is increasingly used to co-finance external projects or build environments where external contributions are possible. Consequently, researchers' ability to independently identify and initiate research has become more limited. However, the institution strives to maintain open and transparent discussions about resource allocation in the university's shared resource distribution process, as well as in decisions on fund allocation within faculties and departments. The university views this as an essential prerequisite for fostering a culture that supports academic freedom.

University of Arts, Crafts and Design states that the institution has a small base allocation for research, which means that only professors are offered research time within their positions. According to University of Arts, Crafts and Design, the low base funding means that researchers at the institution largely rely on externally funded research.

Some institutions, including Dalarna University, note that specific time for research is allocated for employees at the institution. The institutions also report other models of fund distribution intended to promote academic freedom. Mid Sweden University states that it promotes academic freedom by allocating a significant portion of research funding to faculties, which then further allocate it to individual disciplines. Funds are then distributed collegially within the disciplines, giving individual researchers considerable freedom to decide their research focus.

The Swedish Defence University reports a funding opportunity from the president's strategic funds through a "seed money program," allowing researchers, including external ones, to apply for funding equivalent to one month's salary to design competitive grant applications for Swedish and European calls. This is expected to strengthen researchers' ability to independently formulate their research projects and increase the number of externally funded projects at the institution.

At the University of Gothenburg, faculties support departments through strategic allocations to strengthen internationalization (e.g., sabbatical and network programs) and interdisciplinary collaborations (e.g., thematic initiatives). Additionally, funds are allocated to cross-departmental and faculty-wide research infrastructures, as individual research groups cannot finance these from their resources, and these infrastructures require long-term planning and funding. The university emphasizes that its funding model generally aims to promote operational responsibility in both education and research.

Recruitment

Several institutions identify insecure employment as a potential obstacle to the free dissemination of knowledge. Örebro University notes that a prerequisite for academic freedom is employment that combines secure working conditions with research time. The university is therefore working to create positions with good working conditions for research. This includes reducing the proportion of fixed-term contracts to increase the number of permanent positions. According to the institution, the stability provided by permanent positions promotes both collegial processes and academic freedom.

Several institutions, including Umeå University, emphasize that open, competitive job postings, thorough external evaluations, and collegial review in appointments can contribute to promoting academic freedom.

Support Structures

Many institutions report various internal support structures that contribute to promoting or safeguarding academic freedom.

Security

Several institutions report that internal security measures are part of efforts to protect academic freedom.

Stockholm University states that its security analysis, in line with the Security Protection Act (2018:585), takes academic freedom into account and identifies the university's protected values. The security plan developed from this analysis aims, among other things, to protect operations against undue threats that could affect academic freedom.

Uppsala University has an "On-Duty Officer" who, according to the institution, is always available to receive alerts about serious incidents and coordinate initial responses before other parts of the organization become involved.

Many institutions also state that they have guidelines or routines for handling hate and threats, available on their intranet. The Swedish Defence University, for instance, reports that its internal webpage under "Support" provides information on what to do in uncomfortable situations and what the university can offer in terms of support. The institution advises employees to inform their immediate supervisor, who typically has responsibility for the work environment and should be aware if an employee is experiencing something that might affect them and their work environment. The security chief assesses cases of hate, threats, and harassment and provides advice related to these workplace issues.

Karlstad University has an action plan for managing threats, violence, and uncomfortable situations. According to the institution, the plan describes how such situations should be prevented, minimized, or eliminated. Preventive measures include leadership development, follow-up, information for new employees, and investigative obligations. The university notes that the action plan also outlines the responsibilities of both managers and employees in handling these situations.

The University of Gävle points out that if anyone perceives or experiences issues within the university but wishes to remain anonymous, the whistleblower function is a simple and secure tool to use.

Administrative Support

Many institutions report various forms of administrative support to promote or safeguard academic freedom. One area highlighted by several institutions, including Karlstad University and Mälardalen University, is support for entering into collaboration agreements.

Mälardalen University states that individual researchers are free to choose whether to join a collaborative project. However, the university's goal of a 50% external funding rate could indirectly challenge academic freedom by potentially pushing researchers into collaborations where their academic freedom is limited. Mälardalen University believes that promoting and protecting academic freedom in collaborative projects involves addressing academic freedom issues at the contract stage by drafting agreements that clarify the university's and individual researcher's rights to freely choose research questions, methods, and the right to publish research results from the project.

Karlstad University echoes this view, stressing that all partners in research collaborations must take responsibility for upholding research

integrity. According to the institution, this is ensured by reaching an agreement with partners on research conditions and objectives, as well as on how results and information about the research will be handled and communicated. The institution's lawyers assist with drafting contracts between collaborative partners.

Karlstad University also notes that the library, together with the institution's lawyers, ensures that copyright for publication and reuse of research results is not exclusively transferred to commercial scientific publishers, allowing researchers to retain control over their work. The institution also emphasizes making research publications as openly accessible as possible. Several other institutions also highlight library support as essential for the dissemination of knowledge.

Other types of support for knowledge dissemination are also reported. Örebro University states that it provides advice on publishing and funding open access in various publishing channels to support researchers' freedom to communicate their research freely. The University of Gävle reports that all research staff have the opportunity to publish through the institution's own publishing house, *Gävle University Press*, which publishes reports, books, and dissertations.

Some institutions also offer support for work on research funding applications and research data management. Örebro University states that it gives researchers opportunities to apply for funding for research time to pursue self-initiated projects. This includes calls for work time, support from the Grants Office, and workshops on preparing applications.

The Swedish Defence University has also established a Grants Office staffed by two research advisors. According to the institution, the Grants Office actively supports the institution's disciplines, research environments, and individual researchers in building long-term strategies for external grant funding as part of capacity building, through seminars and outreach activities. The institution reports that this has led to an increase in both the quality and quantity of applications for external funding.

The University of Gävle offers research data support to assist research staff with handling, storing, archiving, weeding, and making research data accessible. Support is also available for information security and legal issues related to research data.

Training Programs

Several institutions highlight training for staff as a component to safeguard and promote academic freedom.

Uppsala University emphasizes that initiatives targeting department heads are particularly important since department heads must handle

both internal challenges in the work environment and institutional culture, as well as external events that teachers and researchers may face. To support and strengthen department heads in their leadership roles, the university organizes training for department heads and deputy heads.

The focus of the training is on the conditions and expectations of the employer role, as well as leadership from different perspectives. According to the university, the program includes discussions and reflections on leading individuals and groups, and issues of academic freedom in relation to this. Topics include collegial governance versus line management, the differences in leading education and research, and the department head's role in balancing various leadership principles and demands with academic freedom. The university points out that the importance of working on visions and goals at the departmental level is also highlighted, and discussions include what the university's priorities for strengthening academic and collegial culture mean for the department. Other discussion topics on academic freedom address relationships with external research funders and handling threats and hate directed at individuals.

At Umeå University, all new managers undergo an introductory management program, followed by Umeå University's Leadership Development Program (UCL), which spans approximately one year and includes a series of shorter courses, informational materials, and more. Another program at the university is the *Research Leadership Program ReaL*, a three-stage program aimed at increasing competence in research leadership and developing successful research environments

In terms of teaching situations, Halmstad University states that its pedagogical qualification courses for staff cover relevant issues related to academic freedom, such as how best to prepare new teachers for teaching subjects that address "difficult" questions.

Regarding hate and threats, Mälardalen University has developed a guide on managing and preventing threatening and violent situations, and it has conducted training sessions for managers based on this guide. For departments that have experienced threats, additional training has been offered. Altogether, the university reports that this effort has contributed to raising awareness about the existence of threats and violence and how to manage and prevent such situations.

Particularly on the Work Environment

Some institutions mention systematic work environment efforts as a way to promote and protect academic freedom. Uppsala University emphasizes that systematic work environment efforts aim to create a secure workplace where, among other things, it is possible to discuss difficult topics.

The University of Gävle states that a work environment characterized by the equal worth of all individuals and a respectful and inclusive attitude forms the foundation of a culture that allows for free search and dissemination of knowledge. This is reflected in the university's core values, educational and research strategy, quality policy, and the Swedish Work Environment Act, which collectively aim to establish a foundation for a perspective on knowledge and a climate of dialogue where different ideas and perspectives can be exchanged with mutual respect. The institution notes that this is further concretized in its work environment goals and plans.

Stockholm University states that it has a central council for work environment and equal conditions (RALV), which also serves as the institution's safety committee. RALV is led by the university director and serves as an advisory body to the vice-President and university management. Within RALV, employer, employee, and student representatives collaborate on university-wide work environment and equal conditions issues. At the departmental level, there are also local councils for collaboration on departmental issues. Furthermore, issues regarding deficiencies in the organizational and social work and study environment are included annually in discussions leading up to the university's risk analysis.

Several institutions also report having policies against abusive behavior, harassment, and discrimination, as well as procedures for handling such situations when they arise.

The University of Gävle states that during its introductory days for new staff (held twice a year), it presents the institution's policy and procedures on discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, and abusive behavior to provide new staff with a clear understanding of the university's stance on these issues.

Practical Measures to Promote and Protect Academic Freedom

Collegial Forums and Advisory Functions

Several institutions mention collegial forums or advisory functions for academic freedom as contributing factors to safeguard and promote it. At Linnaeus University, for example, academic freedom is discussed in collegial forums, including discussions based on external monitoring and current cases. The university believes that when academic freedom is challenged, the collegial setting can serve as a forum for advice, support, and shared learning. According to the university, the collegial environment is a key factor in fostering a culture that promotes academic freedom, ensuring high quality through peer review.

Lund University has a central council for ethics and academic freedom. The university reports that the council works to increase understanding of the importance of an ethical approach in university activities. The council's aim is to stimulate discussion and debate on ethical issues and promote knowledge development in the fields of ethics and academic freedom.

Umeå University emphasizes that general collegial discussions on core values and dilemmas at various levels, particularly at the departmental level, are also important for maintaining a well-functioning culture.

Monitoring Academic Freedom

Some institutions report different methods of monitoring academic freedom within the institution. University West, for instance, states that the conditions for research are reviewed annually through a structured report from each department to the institution-wide Research and Education Committee.

At Umeå University, reporting routines between organizational levels include regular meetings between the university management and the leadership of faculties, the School of Education, the university library, and university administration. The university's leadership meets with each faculty every five weeks, and once a semester, department heads join for an expanded dialogue. At regular dialogue meetings, "deviation reporting" is a standard agenda item, where any suspected or occurring negative incidents are discussed. The university notes that there are also routines for department heads to report any potential negative incidents in writing or orally to faculty management.

Umeå University also stresses the importance of continuously monitoring internal regulations, routines, and quality systems to ensure they do not contain or add elements that unnecessarily limit the freedom of individual teachers and researchers to choose how best to educate and conduct research.

Seminar Culture

Several institutions highlight the importance of building a seminar culture where academic freedom is respected. Södertörn University emphasizes that it actively strives to create an open, generous seminar culture with critical conversations characterized by respect for different perspectives and viewpoints. According to the university, this also applies to its educational activities, which should also be characterized by academic freedom in the sense of independent scientific judgment. Uppsala University emphasizes that during doctoral training, doctoral students are trained in seminar culture and academic discourse.

Mälardalen University reports that the free search and dissemination of knowledge are promoted and safeguarded by researchers supporting each

other in developing both individual and collective knowledge pursuits. This is done, according to the institution, through seminars, guest lectures, and "friendly reviews." The institution highlights senior colleagues and groups like the supervisory committee as important in this work. A supportive, transparent, and inclusive professional environment is, according to the university, a prerequisite for individual academic freedom, as well as initiatives to increase competence in attracting external funding.

Among the University of Gothenburg's active initiatives is organizing seminars on controversial topics.

Students

Some institutions highlight the importance of involving students in issues related to academic freedom. According to Malmö University, there is a high ambition within the institution to ensure that all students acquire academic literacy, which familiarizes them with the demands of higher education. This includes both practical skills, such as reading and writing according to the standards of university studies, as well as the ability to discuss, critique, and argue in an academically acceptable manner.

Malmö University asserts that students acquire academic literacy through their studies, but there are also various support functions in this area, benefiting both students and teachers. The Centre for Academic Teaching and Learning (CAKL) is a university-wide center that offers training and conducts research in higher education pedagogy, academic literacy, widening recruitment, and broad participation. CAKL supports teachers in improving their teaching and students in developing their learning. The center offers workshops and courses in higher education pedagogy aligned with academic values, such as the courses *Academic Teaching* and *Teaching for Critical Thinking*.

Malmö University mentions a challenge highlighted by several teachers: "the academic dialogue" – where different opinions and perspectives are shared in a seminar-like setting – is significantly hampered if students do not participate physically in the education. Since physical attendance can only be required during examinations, some students skip on-campus sessions, which teachers find problematic in multiple ways.

Therefore, Malmö University is discussing various initiatives and actions to increase physical attendance, both to improve students' ability to acquire relevant knowledge and to engage in academic dialogue, thereby enhancing their academic literacy.

The Swedish Defence University reports that it has had a higher education pedagogy function for some time, with a director and staff responsible for educational matters related to academic freedom. This function works actively to ensure that teaching and learning

environments foster an open and constructive climate of dialogue. According to the university, this function strengthens academic freedom from within by continuously emphasizing the importance of pedagogical perspectives on inclusive teaching and academic integrity, which contribute to an open dialogue climate. The university points out that academic integrity and inclusive teaching are standard topics in its pedagogical courses and are also addressed in the ongoing support work by the pedagogical function, primarily aimed at the university's academic staff.

At the University of Gothenburg, student work environment surveys are conducted by several faculties, including questions about the dialogue climate in lecture halls and seminar rooms.

Knowledge-Building Activities

Uppsala University states that it has initiated research on higher education and academic freedom, including its conditions and threats.

Questions 2 and 3: How Common Is It for Academic Freedom to Be Challenged?

UKÄ asked institutions to respond to how often academic freedom is challenged internally, meaning in situations that arise within the institution, and externally, meaning through influence by actors outside the institution.

UKÄ further asked the institutions to provide examples of when academic freedom was challenged internally and externally and to describe specifically how the institution acted to protect academic freedom in these situations and what lessons were learned.

Most institutions provide a discussion on the ways in which academic freedom is challenged. A recurring theme in these discussions is that it is difficult for institutions to identify situations where academic freedom is challenged, as these situations may also involve matters such as work environment, employment conditions, different interpretations of regulations, or reactions to strategic operational governance or the institution's distribution of research funding. Several institutions note that they lack systems or mechanisms to assess how frequently academic freedom is challenged.

The preparatory works to Chapter 1, Section 6 of the Higher Education Act specify that the provision does not include the relationship between the state and the institutions, but rather the relationship between the institution and the individual. Responses from institutions show that

academic freedom is perceived to encompass more than just the relationship between the institution and the individual.

Internal and External Challenges

When asked how common it is for academic freedom to be challenged internally, no institution responded that it is common. Nearly half of the institutions instead state that it is uncommon for academic freedom to be challenged internally. The remaining institutions, a little over half, do not take a clear stance. When asked about how common it is for academic freedom to be challenged externally, one institution responded that it is common, a few say it is uncommon, and the large majority do not take a clear stance.

Several institutions write that not all situations in which academic freedom is challenged are known to the leadership or central functions such as the HR or security department, or even the immediate supervisor. One reason raised by several institutions is that those whose academic freedom is challenged may not wish or dare to inform about the situation, partly due to academic conformity.

Örebro University articulates a perception shared by several institutions:

"A challenge that has been accelerating over a longer period and affects both external and internal conditions is academic conformity. In simple terms, this involves strategies based on adaptation to conventions to achieve academic success or survival."

What Challenges Academic Freedom?

In the responses from institutions, several phenomena are identified as challenges to academic freedom, either internally or externally. Even most of the institutions that respond that it is uncommon for academic freedom to be challenged internally provide examples of when it does occur. The institutions give examples of how academic freedom risks being affected by strategic operational governance or other frameworks institutions must adhere to, such as the distribution of research funds and regulations that can limit free search for knowledge. Other areas highlighted include the impact of insecure employment conditions, the relationship between work environment issues and academic freedom, and challenges in teaching situations.

Operational Governance

Several institutions express that academic freedom is challenged internally when an individual teacher or researcher is restricted as a result of the strategic choices institutions make regarding research areas, methods, and publication channels. Some smaller institutions note that researchers who are not part of prioritized research environments may

feel that their ability to conduct research is restricted, for instance, by not being prioritized in the allocation of internal research resources.

A common observation from institutions of all sizes is that the academic freedom of researchers and teachers is challenged by time limitations.

Malmö University writes:

"An important issue in promoting and safeguarding academic freedom is the time that teachers have available for education and research. A clear pattern, seen across all of the university's research and educational areas, is that teachers and researchers feel they have too little time for research, especially due to a lack of contiguous research time. This results in university teachers being torn between teaching and research, which in turn affects the conditions for free thought and free research. Additionally, many teachers feel that administrative tasks and quality assurance work are more burdensome than before."

However, the University of Gothenburg states that the boundary between legitimate strategic operational governance and what may be interpreted as internally imposed restrictions on academic freedom is not always clear, constituting an area for ongoing dialogue across different levels within the institution.

Research Funding

Several institutions mention research funding as a challenge to academic freedom. It is primarily seen that targeted calls, external research funds, and collaborations can bring various challenges. In this regard, academic freedom is mainly challenged externally by actors outside the institution, but this influence may lead to internal challenges to academic freedom in situations that arise within the institution.

Örebro University writes:

"Firstly, co-financed projects may require researchers to adapt their research to external partners. Researchers and collaborators may have different interests, which can affect the choice of research questions, theoretical frameworks, research design, and publication formats. Secondly, co-financing commitments reduce the university's budget for funding researcher-initiated research or for financing research time in positions. This effect can also lead to varying conditions for free research across different areas and fields."

Types of Employment

Several institutions raise concerns that certain types of employment or job tasks can hinder teachers and researchers from exercising their academic freedom in practice. This includes insecure positions, such as fixed-term contracts early in a research career that often end when

funding runs out, or teachers who, due to teaching or administrative duties, have limited time for research.

Linköping University writes:

"Teaching qualifications are not always valued as highly as research qualifications in recruitment and promotion, which puts employees with less research time in a situation where their ability to freely choose research directions is affected."

The situation of doctoral students, according to several institutions, can challenge their academic freedom. In theory, doctoral students have the right to independently choose research questions and methods, but in practice, it often happens that they are employed in externally funded research projects or within a research school with a specific focus, which limits their choices. Some institutions point out that a potential challenge to doctoral students' academic freedom is their dependency on their supervisor, and the smaller the research environment, the more difficult it may be for a doctoral student to change supervisors. There are also instances where collaborators, external funders, or supervisors try to influence when and where doctoral students publish their research results.

Regulations

Several institutions cite various regulations as examples of external challenges to academic freedom. The laws and regulations raised by institutions include issues related to ethics review, privacy issues, research misconduct, and rights. While institutions do not question the need to comply with existing laws on research and education, they point out that regulatory compliance takes a significant amount of time and resources. Institutions also criticize some laws and regulations as being, in their view, overly extensive. They argue that certain research or research methods risk being set aside in favor of research that, for example, does not require ethical review, challenging academic freedom.

Content, Conduct, and Assessment in Education

An internal challenge to academic freedom raised by several institutions is that students sometimes attempt to influence the content and conduct of education. This includes situations where students, and sometimes even their parents, have opinions on the grading of exams or theses. It also involves cases where students and teachers may have differing opinions within an educational setting, where one or both parties may feel that their academic freedom is challenged. These institutions emphasize the importance of teacher teams and faculty groups discussing and managing such situations to prevent them from escalating into harassment, threats, or intimidation.

Linköping University writes:

"When it comes to teaching, course evaluations are important tools for feedback and follow-up. However, they can also challenge academic freedom by giving lower ratings to courses with difficult or sensitive topics. This can lead teachers to avoid teaching that challenges students' beliefs or to adjust course content."

Work Environment

Several institutions report that conflicts arise between researchers, between teachers, between teachers and students, and between students, all of which affect the work environment. These situations can also be perceived as internal challenges to academic freedom. However, institutions emphasize that it is the task of science and academia to question and critique. The institutions that address work environment issues believe they are generally capable of managing these situations and highlight the importance of critical thinking and academic discourse within an open, inclusive, and accepting environment.

Lund University writes:

"Discussions within academia sometimes cross boundaries, but they are generally corrected by colleagues within their respective fields and environments. When conflicts become too significant or systematic, they may be identified as a work environment issue, after which specific processes and actions can be initiated. In these types of conflicts and situations, it may be argued that an individual academic's freedom is under threat. However, the institution primarily treats these situations as work environment issues."

Harassment, Threats, and Intimidation

Most institutions report that threats and harassment, especially directed at researchers and teachers, have increased and pose a challenge to academic freedom. Certain fields of research and topics are particularly affected, including climate issues, plant research on genetically modified food, virus research (especially during the pandemic), gender studies, gender identity, migration, integration, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, social work, crime, and military conflicts.

The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences writes:

"In these areas, there are both conflicting goals and strong, differing opinions with many stakeholders, including the public, (political) organizations, the public sector, and companies. These issues often involve strong personal, economic, and, not least, political interests, which means they are frequently debated and visible in the media."

Harassment, threats, and intimidation can occur within the institution, as well as attempts at influence from actors outside the institution, resulting in both internal and external challenges to academic freedom. When

threats and harassment occur internally, institutions try to resolve the situation in the classroom if students are involved or through administrative channels if colleagues are involved. Sometimes, though not always, the situation is treated as a work environment issue, in which case HR is included in the internal process.

Stockholm University writes:

"There have been instances where students pointed out that certain topics and texts may be sensitive, and departments have made it clear that no trigger warnings are issued. Instead, the focus is on ensuring that classrooms and educational spaces are safe so that students feel encouraged to present ideas, engage in dialogue, and challenge the notion that everyone must think alike."

Many instances of threats and harassment come from actors outside the institutions. Several institutions report that they have procedures for providing support to those affected, involving HR, the communications department, and the security department. It is also noted that at some institutions, these procedures are relatively new, and efforts are being made to raise awareness about them among staff.

The examples shared by institutions demonstrate different outcomes when researchers have been exposed to harassment, threats, and intimidation.

An example from Örebro University:
After presenting results from an internationally published study in the media, a researcher was subjected to extensive harassment and abuse via social media and email. The study's findings were perceived by some as contributing to an ongoing political debate, which further intensified the responses. As part of the pressure against the researcher, the study was also reported for research misconduct. Colleagues within the field, the relevant faculty, and the university supported the researcher through personal contacts as well as public statements. The university also provided advice on security-related matters. After some time, the researcher chose to leave that specific area of research to pursue studies in other fields.

An example from Umeå University:
An external funder contacted a department and even the dean on multiple occasions to question research conducted at the department as well as opinion pieces that researchers at the department had contributed to. The funder also questioned the competence of these researchers. On those occasions, the department leadership did not respond to the funder but instead explained what academic freedom entails and emphasized that the university does not take a stance on research questions but defends the

> researchers' right to choose their own research questions without external pressure.

An example from Halmstad University:
A researcher who has been involved in the public conversation around their research for many years has participated as an expert in various TV programs and held regular positions as a columnist for different Swedish newspapers. In recent years, political interests have identified this researcher as an opponent, leading to heavy criticism in the media. This, in turn, has resulted in harassment and threats through social media, as well as more direct threats via personal letters, phone calls, etc. The researcher has expressed that they will no longer participate in public discussions related to their research, as the personal toll has become too high, and their health has been negatively impacted.

Participating in Public Discussions

Several institutions express that there is an expectation for individual institutions and researchers to take a stance on various societal issues and contribute to the public debate. Institutions choose to meet this expectation within the framework of their engagement mission by organizing seminars and conferences aimed at the public, offering knowledge and an academic dialogue on current issues. Many institutions describe that it is common for participants in such events to face varying degrees of harassment or even threats and hate.

An example from Örebro University:
Prior to a public lecture at the university, an external activist group protested against the lecture's topic and perspective. As the intensity of the protests increased, it became clear that there was a risk the group intended to disrupt or prevent the lecture from taking place. The institution supported the organizers and senior lecturers in proceeding with the event and arranged security measures. However, the organizers, in consultation with the senior lecturers, decided not to proceed with the lecture.

Several institutions discuss students, teachers, and researchers engaging in activism as part of their teaching or research. The institutions carefully consider including various perspectives without compromising academic freedom.

Umeå University writes:

"A dilemma in the discussion about academic freedom arises when colleagues act unscientifically in debates or are highlighted by the media for unscientific positions. An example of this was some researchers' anti-vaccine engagement during the pandemic. Teachers and researchers, of course, have the same freedom of expression as anyone else in participating in public debate in various ways. Moreover, it is important for teachers and researchers to be active from their expertise, to question, provide deeper context, and present scientifically based criticism within their field. This includes questioning societal developments and political or governmental decisions. However, a constant balance must be discussed between acting in one's professional role and acting as a citizen, with regard to the importance of maintaining public trust in research and higher education. Even though engagements that could damage public trust are rare, there needs to be a collegial discussion about where the boundaries lie and what is appropriate based on academic responsibility."

Södertörn University writes:

"Another recent example is the 'Walkout in Solidarity with Gaza' appeal directed at Swedish institutions in late October 2023. The university acknowledges that students – as well as teachers and other staff – have the right to freely express their opinions and advocate for them. However, this should not be done in a way that disrupts or hinders the university's operations. Should this occur, it would challenge academic freedom. If a student or staff member feels pressured to participate in a demonstration, it would also represent a serious violation of their democratic rights."

Underreporting and Self-Censorship

While institutions find it challenging to answer the question of how often academic freedom is challenged, several institutions point out that there is significant underreporting of situations where academic freedom is challenged both internally and externally, and which never come to the attention of leadership or even immediate supervisors. Institutions also raise concerns about the risk of self-censorship among students, teachers, and researchers who face such challenges.

Linköping University writes:

"Threats against individual researchers can, in the long run, threaten academic freedom for all or parts of the research community, as fear of threats and harassment may influence future choices of research areas. Researchers may practice a form of 'self-censorship' and choose not to pursue research questions that have previously resulted in threats to themselves or their colleagues."

Lessons Learned

Institutions also provide examples of lessons learned from situations where academic freedom was challenged. Both generally and in relation to specific cases, institutions are largely in agreement on the insights gained.

One lesson emphasized by many institutions is the importance of support from leadership. It is essential that leadership at all levels clearly communicates that the institution stands up for academic freedom and supports its students, teachers, and researchers.

University of Gothenburg writes:

"Quick and unconditional support from department, faculty, and university leadership is crucial in such situations. In these cases, work environment efforts are also essential, such as maintaining open discussions on how to handle preparedness for public events involving potentially sensitive or conflict-generating topics, and ensuring the protection of employees and students in cases where teaching is disrupted or prevented."

Equally important is that the institution has good preparedness to handle emerging situations. This involves training for those who will act when academic freedom is challenged, checklists or similar resources for action, and proactive monitoring of the institution's environment.

Malmö University writes:

"The communications department plays a key role, especially in monitoring social media flows. If a concrete threat situation arises, the security chief is involved to ensure the safety and security of those affected. This could involve monitoring social media, blocking emails, or 'hiding' the individual – at the very least, significantly reducing online exposure, removing contact details, or possibly equipping them with a personal alarm. Just as important as taking reactive measures is clearly communicating and standing up for academic freedom and ensuring that researchers and teachers report serious incidents to the police."

Institutions emphasize that clear messaging and effective preparedness require a shared understanding of the importance of academic freedom across the organization.

Uppsala University writes:

"Ongoing, principled discussions at all levels within the university about what academic freedom means, for individuals and the institution, are necessary to create conditions for consensus and an open climate of dialogue. For this purpose, an employee policy has been developed along with materials for discussions at the collegial level."

In addition to the common lessons shared by many institutions, some institutions share insights from complex and high-profile cases where academic freedom has been challenged.

The Example of University of Arts, Crafts and Design, the "Vita Havet" (White Sea) Exhibition Space

Internal disagreements regarding reception, communication, and broader inclusion escalated from dialogue and discussion to media debate. Issues surrounding academic and artistic freedom, racism, freedom of expression, ethics, and the work environment came to the forefront.

Following an internal work environment investigation, actions were taken to support those affected, halt ongoing issues, and introduce preventive measures to avoid similar situations in the future. Interventions were carried out at the individual, group, and organizational levels, including, among other things, Open Dialogue Sessions (three-hour workshops) for about 70 employees, an FAQ based on students' questions, and enhanced sections in higher education pedagogy training on equal treatment and equal opportunity issues.

In autumn 2021, the Swedish Work Environment Authority conducted an inspection at University of Arts, Crafts and Design, focusing on how the employer works preventively against risks of abusive behavior.
After describing the actions taken in detail, University of Arts, Crafts and Design draws the following lessons:

- "When work environment issues threaten academic freedom, problems arise at multiple levels – individual, group, and organizational. Actions must therefore be taken quickly at all levels. Systematic follow-up of ongoing actions must be ensured: who is responsible when cases escalate from individual to group to organizational level.

- Information on the state's core values and dilemma exercises for employees should be offered regularly. Balancing trust with freedom of opinion can be challenging for employees.

- Training in ensuring a good work environment, conflict management, and equal treatment for students and employees must be periodically reinforced. Methods to strengthen free exchange of ideas and knowledge are needed in both formal and informal forums. Academic freedom is negatively impacted if teachers and researchers become reluctant to contribute to internal discussions.

- Freedom of expression should secure free exchange of opinions, comprehensive and balanced information, and artistic freedom. The whistleblower protection means public employees can share information about their workplace with journalists, which protects all parties if an internal conflict becomes public. Work environment measures must be balanced with caution by the employer to avoid criticizing employees who act via the media.

- Current issues within the institution can easily be co-opted for other purposes. A polarized media platform quickly emerges for political and other conflicts. When staff and students no longer recognize the issues raised in the media, trust in both the institution and media is at risk. This is often accompanied by aggressive statements and unpleasant comments directed at staff and students. When teachers and researchers fear continued participation in public debate, academic freedom is threatened.

- In the current example, work environment measures should have been implemented more quickly, with greater clarity, and with initial external support from occupational health services or other independent bodies. Early discussions with those involved should have taken place on-site, despite the pandemic. A constructive climate for dialogue should have been established before disagreements escalated. That University of Arts, Crafts and Design did not do enough to ensure everyone's right to feel safe and welcome in their workplace is a failure of the organization."

UKÄ's Observations

Institutional Responses Vary

UKÄ initially notes that the responses to question one, where institutions were asked to describe their own work in promoting and protecting academic freedom, differ significantly in both focus and detail. The emphasis in responses varies from describing, for example, quality assurance, particularly for research, efforts to ensure a safe work environment, policy documents, internal resource allocation, or support structures. Some responses are brief, while others are far more detailed.

Similarly, there is variation in how institutions responded to UKÄ's questions regarding the frequency of challenges to academic freedom and examples of such challenges.

Institutional Stances

Most institutions express a stance on academic freedom, either through memberships in various organizations and recommendations or through overarching policy documents that include visions, strategies, goals, core values, and employee policies. The primary focus in these descriptions appears to be on freedom of research. One possible explanation for this is that the specific provision on freedom of research in Chapter 1, Section 6, second paragraph of the Higher Education Act (HL) has been in place longer than the provision on academic freedom in Chapter 1, Section 6, first paragraph, which also includes the freedom of education.

Strategic Leadership and Governance

UKÄ observes that many institutions emphasize that a decentralized organization with collegial governance and decision-making processes is central to promoting and protecting academic freedom. A decentralized organization ensures that decisions and evaluations affecting research and education are made as close to the actual activities as possible.

Many institutions also discuss governance in terms of resource allocation and access to research funding. These discussions reflect the various prioritizations that must be made due to the research funding system. UKÄ notes that the boundaries of academic freedom are not always clear. For instance, freedom of research cannot imply a right for all researchers to receive unlimited funding for all their research ideas, yet overly limited funding also restricts the practical significance of freedom of research.[16]

Institutions describe different resource allocation models aimed at fostering collaborations, infrastructure, or research projects that might otherwise be difficult to execute.

Support Structures

Internal security efforts and preparedness for handling harassment and threats have been highlighted by several institutions as part of protecting academic freedom. This includes, in some cases, a designated function to contact in urgent situations. Further, institutions have routines and action plans for managing harassment and threats that are readily accessible. Many institutions also report having policies against abusive behavior, harassment, and discrimination, as well as procedures for managing such situations when they arise.

In their responses, many institutions also highlight various forms of administrative support aimed at promoting and protecting academic freedom, both externally and internally. An example of support to protect academic freedom from external influence includes legal support for drafting collaboration agreements within research projects.

Institutions also mention administrative support that frees up time for research, such as research data management and assistance with research funding applications.

Cultural Issues

Some institutions report practical efforts to promote a culture that allows the free search for, and free dissemination of knowledge. Among the most common approaches are collegial forums, where current cases

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[16] See also: SOU 2019:6, s. 109.

involving academic freedom can be discussed. Such settings can also provide advice, support, and shared learning.

Active efforts to create a permissive seminar culture are also frequently mentioned as culture-promoting activities. Measures directed at students aim to include them in fostering an open and constructive dialogue environment.

Training and Follow-Up

UKÄ notes that a few institutions report that aspects of academic freedom are included primarily in leadership training. Training for other teaching and research staff, as well as students, is mentioned less frequently.

According to several institutions, academic freedom is considered in follow-ups as part of quality assurance work. However, fewer institutions report conducting other follow-ups, such as employee surveys or surveys on student work environments. Some institutions, however, address systematic work environment efforts as part of promoting and protecting academic freedom.

Unclear How Commonly Academic Freedom is Challenged

UKÄ observes that due to the lack of systems or mechanisms for institutions to assess situations where academic freedom is challenged, it is difficult for institutions to answer UKÄ's question on the frequency of challenges to academic freedom, both internally and externally. Nearly half of the institutions respond that it is uncommon for academic freedom to be challenged internally, meaning in situations arising within the institution, whereas only a few institutions respond that it is uncommon for academic freedom to be challenged externally, meaning through influence by actors outside the institution. Institutions also point out that there is significant underreporting of situations where academic freedom is challenged, which may never reach the attention of leadership or central functions such as HR, security departments, or even the nearest supervisor – likely because those affected may not wish or dare to report the situation.

In their responses, institutions outline what challenges academic freedom internally and externally, and they also provide examples of situations where academic freedom has been challenged, along with the measures taken by the institution. UKÄ's impression is that institutions often feel capable of handling internal challenges but find it more difficult to manage external challenges. This is particularly the case with harassment, threats, and abuse, with institutions providing examples of researchers who have chosen to change research focus or seminars that have been annulled.

Survey Targeted at Teachers, Researchers, and Doctoral Students at Swedish Higher Education Institutions

The previous chapter outlined institutions' efforts to promote and protect academic freedom in both research and education. UKÄ noted that, as institutions often lack systems or mechanisms to gain an understanding of situations and instances where individual academic freedom is challenged, it is difficult for institutions to answer UKÄ's question on how frequently academic freedom is challenged internally and externally.

This chapter presents the results of a survey designed to examine how researchers, teachers, and doctoral students at Swedish higher education institutions perceive their academic freedom and how academic freedom generally functions in their everyday academic lives. The results aim to complement other components and perspectives of the study by providing insights from researchers, teachers, and doctoral students on the challenges they face, how institutions address these issues, and how well-equipped they feel to exercise their academic freedom. The hope is that these survey results will serve as a knowledge base for institutions' continued efforts to promote and protect academic freedom.

Survey Implementation

A survey was sent to 10,027 individuals in the autumn of 2023. The sample included doctoral students and teaching and research staff at universities and university colleges. The sampling frame consisted of 40,929 individuals, and respondents were selected through a stratified random sample.

The survey was conducted by Statistics Sweden (SCB), mainly as a web survey, though respondents could also answer a paper version. Invitations were sent on October 30, 2023, with the final of three reminders on December 12, 2023. Respondents could choose to complete the survey in either Swedish or English. The questions were developed by UKÄ, underwent a technical review by SCB, and were tested on representatives of the target group. The questionnaire included questions on whether respondents felt that academic freedom at Swedish

institutions is currently being challenged, how it is challenged if so, whether they have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom, and how they perceive their institution's work to promote and protect academic freedom. Both the Swedish and English versions of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.

A total of 3,768 people responded to the survey, corresponding to a response rate of 38 percent. An analysis of non-responses showed variation in response rates among different groups in the population. Therefore, a weight was calculated for each respondent to allow for presenting results for the entire population and not just the respondents. These weights compensate for unit non-response, that is, individuals who chose not to respond. All proportions presented in the report are weighted.

For three questions, respondents had the option to freely formulate their responses in text. This resulted in 3,132 free-text responses across the three questions. These responses were coded by UKÄ according to a coding scheme developed based on the content of the responses, to categorize them into larger groups. Calculated proportions are weighted for the free-text questions as well.

The introduction to the questionnaire included the following description:

In this questionnaire, when we use the term academic freedom, we mean a culture that allows the free search for knowledge and the free dissemination of knowledge in both research and teaching (in accordance with the 2020 research policy bill (Bill 2020/21:60).

A detailed and comprehensive description of the methodology is available in the technical report, see Appendix 1.

Academic Freedom in the Role of Teachers, Researchers, and Doctoral Students

A large majority of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students, 89 percent, consider academic freedom to be a very important prerequisite for their work. Ten percent find it somewhat important, and a small percentage (less than one percent) do not consider it important (Figure 1).
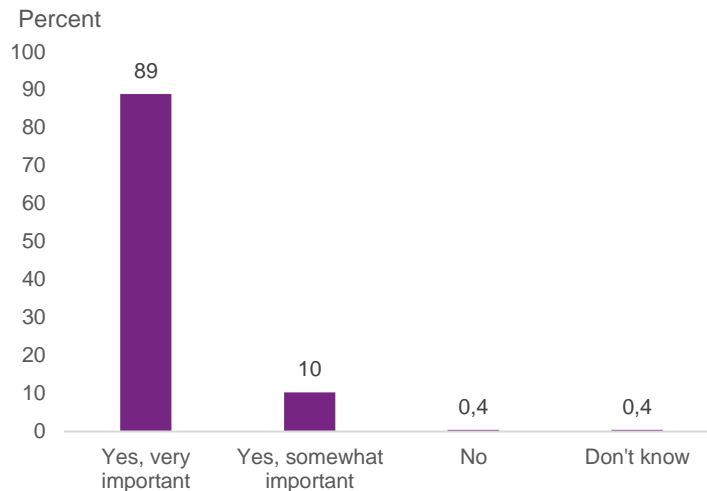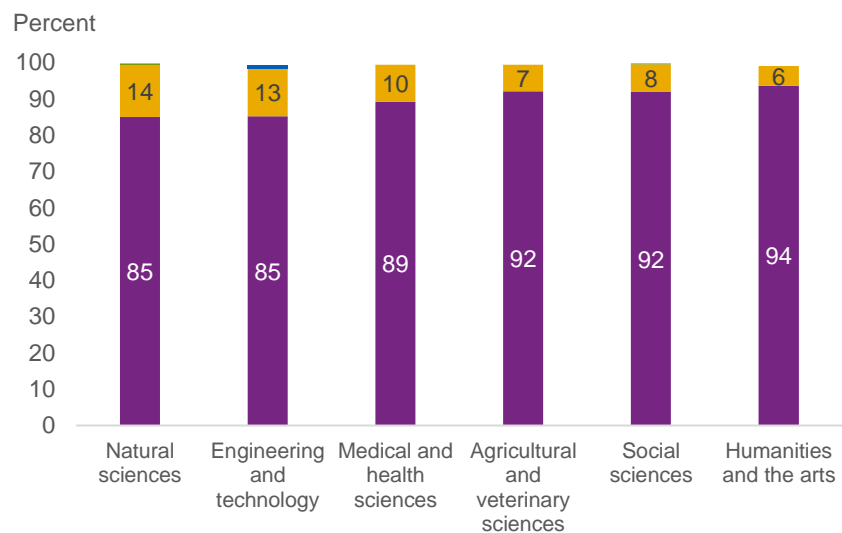
Figure 1. Response to the question: Do you feel that academic freedom is an important prerequisite for your work as a researcher/teacher? Number of respondents: 3,763. Responses in percentages.

There is no difference between men and women, but some variation exists among teachers, researchers, and doctoral students across different research fields. Those in the social sciences and humanities and the arts are more likely to consider it very important, compared to those in natural sciences and engineering and technology (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Response to the question: "Do you feel that academic freedom is an important prerequisite for your work as a researcher/teacher?" divided by research field. Number of responses: 614 (natural sciences), 522 (engineering and technology), 802 (medical and health sciences), 325 (agricultural and veterinary sciences), 975 (social sciences), 509 (humanities and the arts). Responses in percentages.

There are also some differences among teachers, researchers, and doctoral students in various employment categories, with senior lecturers

differing from others. Among senior lecturers, 79 percent consider academic freedom a very important prerequisite for their work, which is lower than in other employment categories.

Discussions on Academic Freedom

Teachers, researchers, and doctoral students primarily discuss academic freedom with their colleagues. Fourteen percent report discussing academic freedom with colleagues weekly. In comparison, 4 percent report discussing it weekly with their immediate superior or students, and 3 percent do so with their collaborators. Thirty-four percent discuss academic freedom with colleagues monthly, compared to 16 percent who discuss it with their supervisors or students monthly, and 15 percent who discuss it with collaborative partners outside of academia monthly. A significantly smaller proportion report that they never talk about academic freedom with colleagues compared to supervisors, students, or collaborative partners outside of academia (Figure 3).

Percent
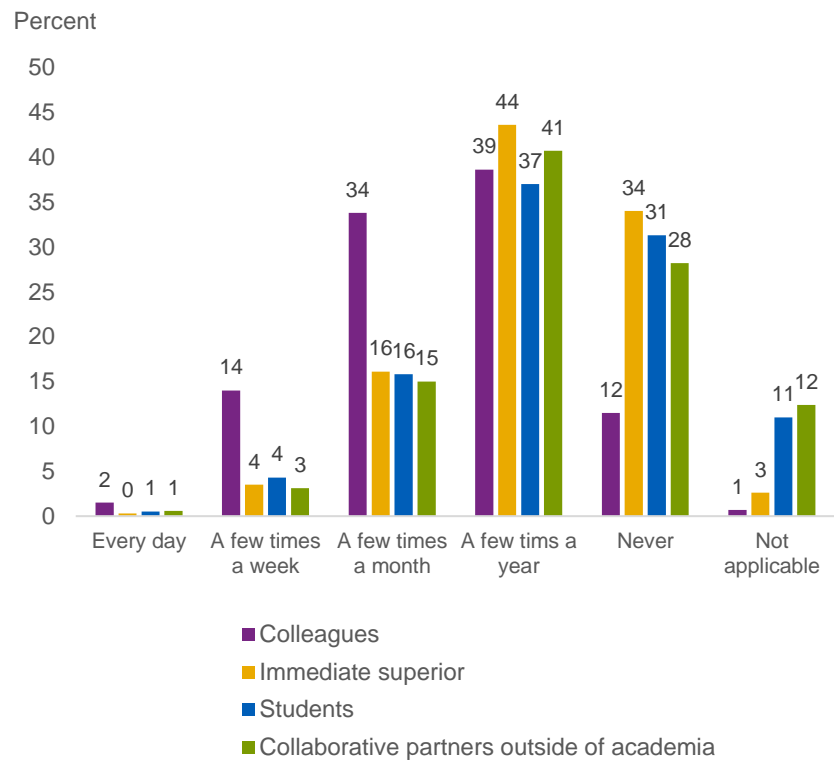
Figure 3. Response to the question: "How often do you discuss aspects of academic freedom with your [colleagues, immediate superior, students, collaborative partners outside of academia]?" Number of responses: 3,762 (colleagues), 3,759 (immediate superior), 3,751 (students), 3,757 (collaborative partners outside of academia). Responses in percentages.

Is Academic Freedom at Swedish Higher Education Institutions Under Challenge?

Every second teachers, researchers, and doctoral students (53 percent) believe that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently challenged. Twenty-three percent believe it is not challenged, while 24 percent respond that they do not know (Figure 4).
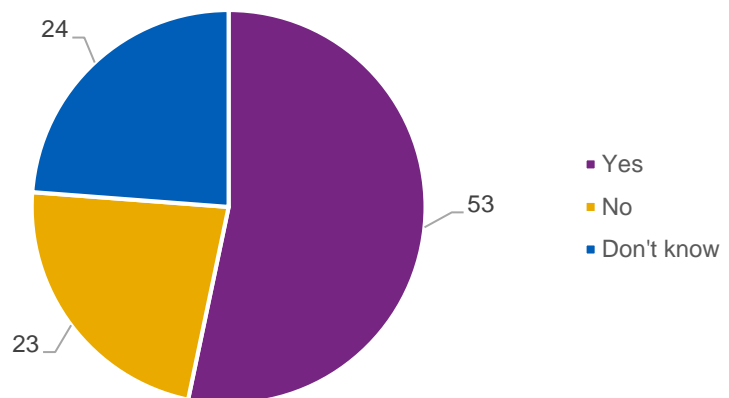

Figure 4. Response to the question: "Do you feel that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged?" Number of respondents: 3,754. Responses in percentages.

The proportion of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students who believe that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged is similar between men and women. Among women, a smaller proportion believe it is not challenged, while a larger proportion report that they do not know (Figure 5).
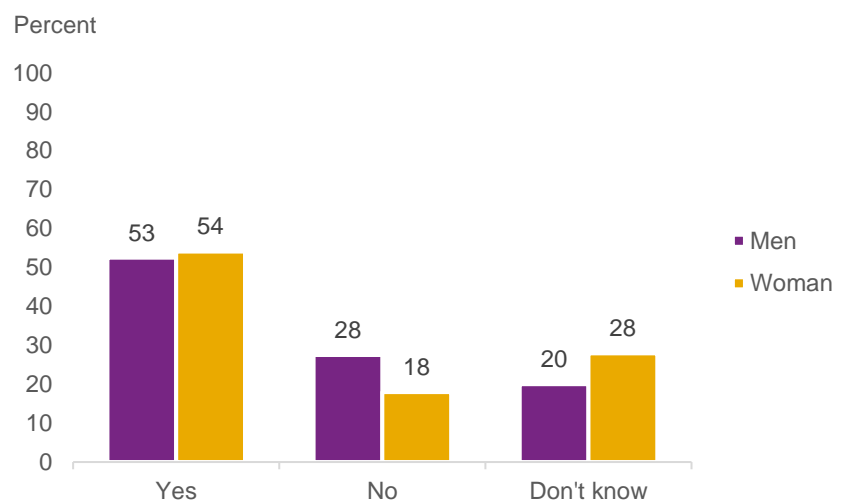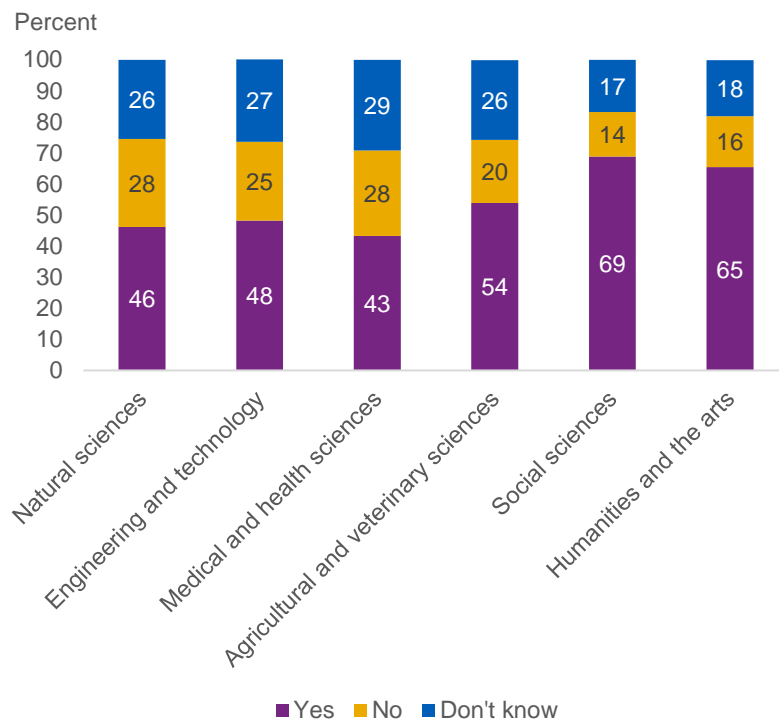

Figure 5. Response to the question: "Do you feel that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged?" divided by

gender. Number of respondents: 1,832 (men), 1,922 (women). Responses in percentages.

There are clear differences across research fields. In the social sciences and in the humanities and the arts, a higher percentage believe that academic freedom is challenged – 69 and 65 percent, respectively. This can be compared to 46 percent in natural sciences and 43 percent in medicine and health sciences (Figure 6). Multivariate analyses show that these differences across research fields remain even when controlling for factors such as gender, age, and employment category.
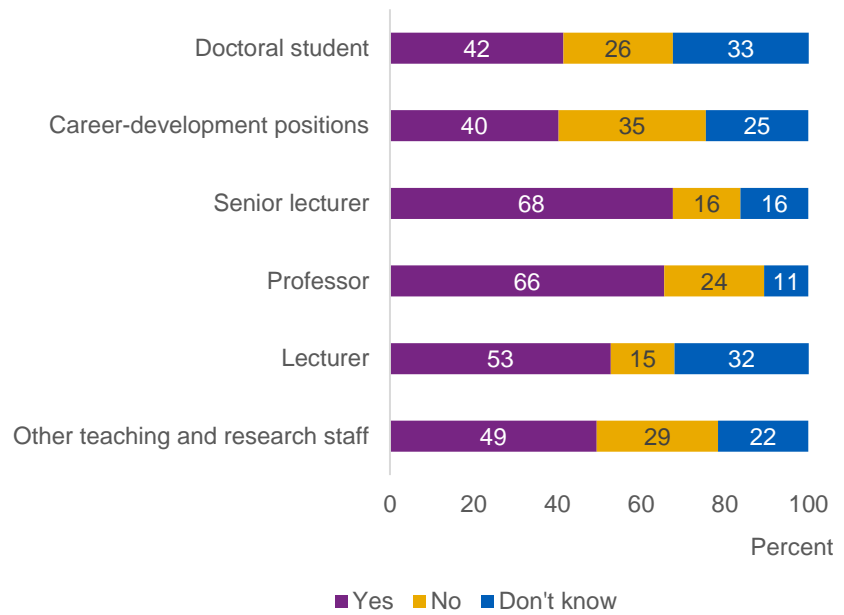

Figure 6. Response to the question: "Do you feel that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged?" divided by research field. Number of respondents: 615 (natural sciences), 522 (engineering and technology), 797 (medical and health sciences), 325 (agricultural and veterinary sciences), 971 (social sciences), 508 (humanities and the arts). Responses in percentages.

There are also differences across employment categories, with professors and senior lecturers more likely to consider academic freedom at Swedish institutions currently challenged. Sixty-six percent of professors and 68 percent of senior lecturers express this view, higher than all other employment categories (Figure 7). Here, too, multivariate analyses show that these differences among employment categories remain when

controlling for factors such as gender, age, research field, institution type[17], and perceived knowledge of academic freedom[18].

Figure 7. Response to the question: "Do you feel that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged?" divided by employment category. Number of respondents: 842 (doctoral student), 338 (career-development position), 972 (senior lecturer), 614 (professor), 505 (lecturer), 483 (other teaching and research staff). Responses in percentages.

What Challenges Academic Freedom at Swedish Institutions?

Those who consider academic freedom at Swedish institutions to be challenged today (53 percent) were asked a follow-up question to describe in what way it is challenged, which nearly all chose to answer. This resulted in 1,956 free-text responses. The individual responses were coded and categorized into larger groups. Table 1 shows all coding categories and the proportion of responses in each category. The categories were created by UKÄ based on the content of the free-text responses, and some overlap among categories may exist.

Overall, the responses show considerable variation, but some common themes can be identified. The most frequently mentioned responses are described in the text, along with examples and direct quotes to illustrate points raised in the survey. Table 1 includes more categories than are discussed in the text. To give as comprehensive and vivid a picture of the

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[17] Broadly established universities, subject-specific universities, university colleges, art-oriented schools, new universities, and other higher education institutions."
[18] The answer to the question "Do you think you have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom in your position as a researcher/teacher?", as asked in the survey.

responses as possible, categories and topics outside the scope of this government assignment are also included. Since the results are intended to contribute to a knowledge base for institutions' continued work in promoting and protecting academic freedom, it is valuable to present what teaching and research staff perceive as challenging to academic freedom in their everyday academic lives.

Table 1. Categories of responses to the question on how academic freedom at Swedish institutions is challenged today. The question was worded "In what way?" and was directed to those who answered "yes" to the question "Do you feel that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged?" The results are based on 1,956 free-text responses. Responses were coded and categorized into the groups shown in the table. Categorization is based on the content of the free-text responses. Some overlap between categories may exist. Note that each respondent could list multiple ways in which academic freedom is challenged. The sum of percentages is therefore greater than 100.

	Proportion (percent)
Political control and political influence in general	29
Research funding and the funding system in general	28
Homogeneity, reluctance to speak up, adherence to norms, conformity	10
Targeted and narrow funding calls	7
Ethics review	6
Dependence on external funders, high proportion of externally funded research	5
Shortening of university board mandates, politically appointed boards	5
Focus on results, demand for quick results, focus on application, relevance to society	4
The government, Tidö Agreement	4
Right-wing extremism, far-right forces	3
Harassment and threats	3
Administrative burden, bureaucratization	3
Less collegial governance, more hierarchical management (NPM)	3
Criticism from students, disruption of teaching	3
Pressure from external actors outside academia	3
Dependence on and influence of collaborative partners	3
Publication requirements, publication pressure	2
Reduced funding	2
Trends in research determine research topics and funding availability	2
The Sweden Democrats	2

Insufficient basic funding	2
Government cutbacks on research funding, cut funding for development research	2
Influence over teaching content	2
Insufficient time in general, limited research time in roles	2
Political correctness	2
Questioning of certain research areas (e.g., gender studies)	2
Economic factors, economy dictates research	2
Leftist values, left-wing politicization, woke culture, identity politics	1
Insecure employment, precarious conditions for researchers and teachers	1
Reference to incidents at Karlstad University*	1
Co-funding requirements, certain funders require institutional matching funds	1
Institutional autonomy, organizational structure of institutions	1
Dominant values in academia, values required in applications	1
Researchers and teachers being doxxed and reported	<1
Cancel culture	<1
The Migration Agency, migration laws	<1
Nepotism and favoritism within academia	<1
Reference to incidents at Chalmers**	<1
Underfunded education	<1
No answer provided or response unclear	2
Other	21

*An incident at Karlstad University in autumn 2023, where a far-right activist enrolled in a course and harassed participants and the instructor, leading to many students dropping out, the instructor going on sick leave, and lectures being cancelled. The disciplinary board ruled there were no legal grounds to expel the student from class.

**In autumn 2023, Chalmers University of Technology introduced a ban on political demonstrations on campus, including posting of flyers. The ban was lifted a few days later.

Political Influence

A common response to the question about what challenges academic freedom at Swedish institutions involved some form of political influence. Often, this is described as a general form of steering or influence from political sources. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Overall, I feel that politicians are increasingly attempting to control research."

"For instance, politicians wanting to determine or limit the content of our education."

Four percent of respondents specifically mentioned the government or the Tidö Agreement as challenging to academic freedom, with two percent mentioning the Sweden Democrats.

Some respondents provided examples of political influence challenging academic freedom. Five percent referred to how university boards are regulated by the government, often mentioning the shortened terms for board members decided in 2023 and noting that board members are politically appointed:

"University boards are becoming politicized."

"The government's decision to halve the terms of external board members is a worrying attempt by politics to micromanage universities."

Another example of political influence is changes in research funding and funding calls, cited by 2 percent of respondents. Many noted the withdrawal of calls in development research in July 2023:

"The government abruptly withdraws research calls and tries to steer research."

"The government's decision to halt all funding for development research via the Swedish Research Council – effectively blocking certain types of research."

Research Funding

Many described that academic freedom is challenged through research funding. Respondents often pointed out that the research funding system limits academic freedom in general terms:

"The allocation of research funds determines the areas to be researched, not necessarily what is academically most interesting or promising."

"The funding system is such that research isn't free; it is directed by where funding is currently available."

The research funding system is also frequently associated with political influence, with steering occurring through funding allocation, the governance of public research funders, and the shaping of research policy:

"Political influence is becoming increasingly noticeable – in both the funding landscape and board matters."

"Political steering from the current government, for instance through the earmarking of research funds."

One aspect of the research funding system that is frequently seen as challenging to academic freedom is targeted funding calls and initiatives,

which 7 percent of respondents feel limits academic freedom. Many believe these targeted calls have increased, restricting potential research topics. Voices from the free-text responses include:

"An increasingly small portion of total research funding is open to researcher-initiated research without steering from funders, companies, or politics regarding the focus or format."

"Research is largely externally funded, with many grants being highly specific – this directs research focus."

High reliance on external funding is in itself considered challenging to academic freedom. Responses indicate that many feels overly dependent on external funders, with significant time spent writing applications and searching for suitable calls. Many also believe that universities' basic funding is too low. Additionally, some describe limited time for research within their roles, leading to a perceived challenge to academic freedom. Some of the voices from the free-text responses include:

"First, research funding is largely externally sourced, requiring applications rather than research time being embedded in lecturing roles. Second, the administrative burden of applications (e.g., ethics review) consumes time and focus."

"Research is heavily grant-dependent (and often requires substantial co-funding from the university), so the direction of research is largely controlled by funders, not the researchers themselves."

Conformity and Homogeneity

One of the most cited reasons academic freedom is seen as challenged is that teachers, researchers, and doctoral students perceive conformity and homogeneity within academic environments. Respondents report avoiding certain topics, discussions, or issues they find significant. Some describe an atmosphere of limited openness in some environments. Doctoral students describe conformity in both academic discussions and research focus choices. Voices from the free-text responses include:

"There is a narrow, dogmatic culture where certain ways of thinking are taken for granted, and ideological perspectives are presented as facts not to be questioned. Criticizing this is taboo unless advocating for even more conformity. An unscientific and strongly anti-intellectual environment is flourishing, especially within the social sciences."

"There are also invisible, implicit norms that, in practice (though not de jure), restrict or at least threaten academic freedom. Based on my experience in the humanities, there is a prevailing consensus on politically progressive ideals, which limits diversity of opinion."

"Increasing political control. Research funding is more targeted, making it hard to secure funding and conduct research that doesn't 'follow the stream' but could lead to societal benefits, innovation, or fresh perspectives. Researchers risk becoming executors of politically decided initiatives."

"In order to attract funding, researchers only write proposals within certain areas and it is a controlled effort to meet the financers requirement. Due to this, there are few research topics where everyone is researching and many other important topics are left behind."

"The unspoken political conformity is damaging. Political steering is theoretically prohibited, but key figures in the system find ways to implement it, primarily through the distribution of tasks and resources. Conversely, these tools are used to silence or de-platform those they view as politically/ideologically different. I have often, with increasing frequency over my 25 years in academia, been astonished by how freely those with the 'right' political profile can politically control and manipulate the systems within academia."

"You are free as long as you are inline within the mainstream discourses."

"Tighter control over opinions from faculty and university leadership. It has never been as stifling in 35 years as it is now."

"Researchers who swim against the current on any issue are inevitably punished. Reputation and the possibility of internal funding are lost. One must be incredibly combative to avoid self-censorship."

Ethics Review

A recurring topic in the free-text responses was ethics review, with 6 percent directly mentioning it. Many describe ethics review as bluntly designed, disadvantaging research in social sciences and humanities. Of the teachers, researchers, and doctoral students that identify ethical reviews as challenging for the academic freedom, 64 percent are in social sciences. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Mainly due to extensive ethics review and registration of personal data processing, which takes time and restricts the types of questions researchers feel they can ask in social sciences."

"The strict rules for ethics review mean I usually avoid conducting studies involving people and instead focus on textual analysis."

"Mainly due to the significant dogmatization of research ethics, which has gradually grown in recent years. This makes it difficult to conduct even simple projects – projects that are approved without issue in

comparable countries – within my field (vulnerable children and families), adding an enormous additional workload."

External Pressures, Hate, Threats, and Harassment

Some teachers, researchers, and doctoral students view pressure from external actors as challenging to academic freedom. These pressures are often conveyed through social media. Many also describe how these pressures escalate into hate, threats, or harassment of individuals. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Academic freedom is primarily threatened by intensified hostility toward academics who engage publicly, for example, when they share their expertise or propose policy measures based on their research. When academics face threats and hatred, academic freedom is at risk – directly for the threatened individual and indirectly, as academics avoid topics that lead to such backlash. I believe this threat mostly comes from the alternative right."

"There are more and more opinions from various actors in society about what should or should not be researched and what type of teaching we should provide – including which subjects we should be working on."

"Threats and harassment of researchers in certain fields (e.g., gender studies), both on social media and from established politicians."

"Harassment and threats from extremists."

"Threats to researchers in an increasingly polarized societal context."

Other Challenges to Academic Freedom

The responses from 1,956 participants who believe academic freedom is challenged at Swedish institutions and who described the ways in which it is challenged are varied and multifaceted. Some of the less frequently mentioned responses are outlined below.

Focus on Results and Applications, Demand for Societal Relevance

Four percent of respondents feel that demands and expectations for societal relevance and utility in research challenge academic freedom. This is often linked to the structure of the funding system and frequently mentioned alongside targeted funding calls and research initiatives. It is also perceived that there is a demand for guaranteed results and applications, leading to short-term research that negatively impacts academic freedom. Some respondents believe these demands come at the expense of freer, curiosity-driven basic research, negatively affecting academic freedom. Some also feel the system favors rapid research over high-quality research. Voices from the free-text responses include:

"The demand for 'utility', a general devaluation of the value and place of the humanities."

"Research becomes short-sighted to produce secure results, which is what funders want."

"Heavy steering toward applicable results that provide value and benefit here and now, which reduces incentives to explore and take larger risks."

Far-Right Extremism and Right-Wing Populism

Just over three percent believe that far-right forces pose a challenge to academic freedom. Several refer to events that took place at Karlstad University in fall 2023, where a far-right activist enrolled as a student and harassed classmates and the instructor, resulting in many students withdrawing from the course, the instructor taking sick leave, and canceled lectures. Terms within this category include far-right forces, radical right-wing populism, and extreme right-wing groups. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Far-right students enroll in courses to disrupt and monitor teachers and students."

"Threats and hatred from far-right circles (with implied potential for violence) are increasingly causing fear of sharing research results publicly, potentially leading researchers to avoid certain topics."

"Far-right forces questioning the veracity of established knowledge."

Administrative Burden and Bureaucratization

Many describe how their academic daily life is filled with administrative tasks, which they see as challenging for academic freedom. Additionally, they point to a general increase in bureaucratization within universities and university colleges that undermines academic freedom. Respondents feel they have a substantial (and sometimes increasing) administrative workload, often related to research and research funding, and they also observe that the number of administrative roles and tasks within institutions is growing. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Through increased bureaucratization of research and teaching."

"Too much research funding and working time is consumed by administration and a self-sustaining administrative apparatus whose only purpose is to produce more administration."

"There are too many external reviews and regulations, which lead to increased administration."

Shift Toward Line Management Over Collegial Governance

Some respondents point out that local management practices within institutions pose a challenge to academic freedom. Some describe their organizations as hierarchical, with top-down decision-making where decisions are made at higher levels. Some feel that collegial decision-making is increasingly being replaced by line management. This is seen as problematic because decisions are made further from the actual work, and there is a perceived decline in understanding academic freedom. Some also label this approach as "New Public Management," which they believe is unsuitable for academia. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Too many people in academia lack a fundamental understanding of the unique character of universities and university colleges, as seen, for instance, in the introduction of line management. Thus, collegial decision-making is even threatened from within the universities themselves."

"Demands for line management instead of collegial governance reduce the understanding of the importance of academic freedom."

Criticism from Students and Disruption in Teaching

Three percent of respondents report that students and student criticism challenge academic freedom. Some feel at risk of their teaching being disrupted or hindered, leading them to avoid certain topics or questions. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"In my teaching, I have various student groups, and for one of them, I know I would not express political or 'politically incorrect' views; I avoid this to prevent reactions."

"As a teacher, I've experienced attacks and challenges regarding discussions on power dynamics, such as gender or other relations of power. Both from personal experience and stories from colleagues at the same and other institutions. This is part of the increasing challenge we see when presenting, discussing, or publishing research results. The challenges are not the critical perspectives we are used to but take on a different form – the offended, the entitled."

"Fear of extremist students and activists targeting researchers, especially far-right groups harassing gender studies and other critical researchers."

Publication Pressure and "Publish or Perish" Culture

Several respondents describe the pressure to publish as challenging for academic freedom. This often involves the need to publish to remain competitive, with a strong emphasis on article formats and reliance on bibliometric indicators for academic merit. This affects researchers' and educators' choices. Some voices from the free-text responses include:

"Focus on quantity metrics for scientific articles shapes research questions toward quick, easy-to-frame studies that fit the rigid article format."

"Excessive focus on journal ranking lists forces one to adapt research to certain methods and areas to be published in the 'right' journals."

"Publish or perish."

Other Areas

Twenty-one percent of respondents provided answers coded as "other." These are responses referenced by only a few respondents and do not fit within the established categories for coding. It should be noted, however, that many respondents cited multiple reasons why academic freedom is challenged, which may overlap with categories but also include elements outside these frameworks, leading them to be coded as "other."

Examples of factors perceived as challenging academic freedom and grouped as "other" include: whistleblowing laws, GDPR, resistance to knowledge, micromanagement, lack of constitutional protection, contract research, access to data, indirect costs (overhead), staff shortages, costs for open access, power held by administrators, artificial intelligence, religion, the assignment of the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) on academic freedom, and remote work restrictions.

Personal Academic Freedom of Teachers, Researchers, and Doctoral Students

Earlier sections discussed whether educators, researchers, and doctoral students feel that academic freedom at Swedish institutions is currently challenged. This section addresses their personal experiences of whether their own academic freedom has been or is being challenged.

Nearly half of the educators, researchers, and doctoral students at Swedish institutions (44 percent) have experienced their academic freedom being challenged at some point during their academic careers in Sweden. Thirteen percent have experienced this several times, and 31 percent a few times. In contrast, 50 percent have never experienced their academic freedom being challenged (Figure 8).
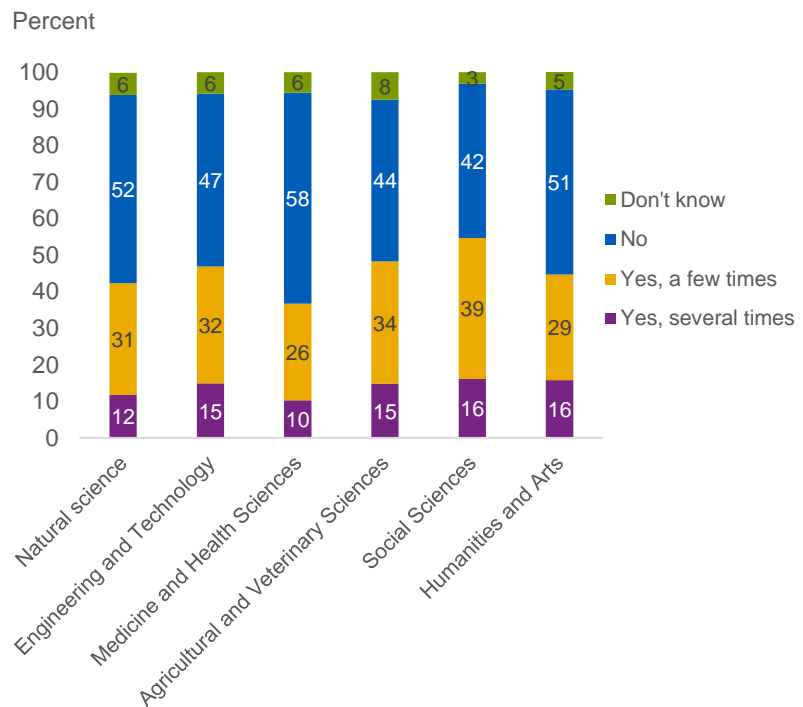
Percent
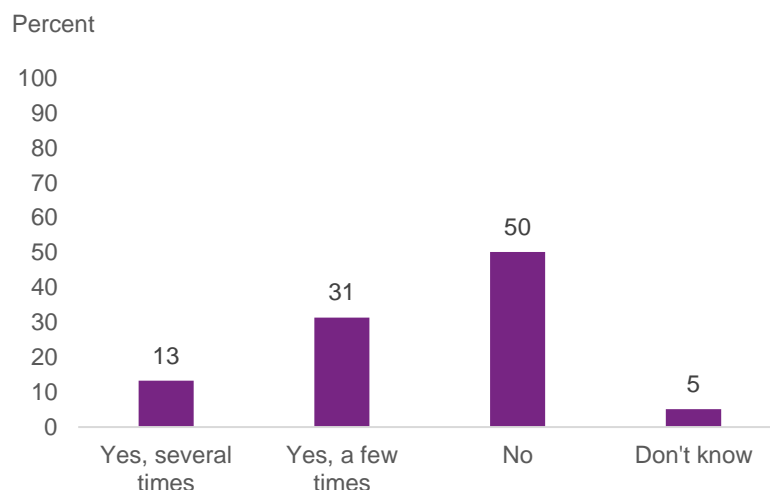
Figure 8: Response to the question, "During your academic career in Sweden, have you ever felt that your academic freedom has been challenged? " Number of responses: 3,756.

There is some variation in responses across research fields (Figure 9). The proportion who have experienced their academic freedom being challenged several times is higher among social sciences staff than among those in medicine and health sciences. Otherwise, there are no statistically significant differences between research fields.

The proportion who have experienced challenges a few times is higher within social sciences than in medicine and health sciences, as well as in the humanities and arts. No other significant differences between groups were found.

The proportion who have never experienced their academic freedom being challenged is higher within medicine and health sciences than in technology, agricultural and veterinary sciences, or social sciences. There is also a statistically significant difference between social sciences and the humanities and arts, where those in the humanities and arts more often report never having experienced a challenge to their academic freedom.

Percent

Figure 9: Response to the question, "During your academic career in Sweden, have you ever felt that your academic freedom has been challenged?" broken down by research field. Number of responses: 614 (natural sciences), 520 (engineering and technology), 798 (medical and health sciences), 325 (agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine), 975 (social sciences), 508 (humanities and the arts).

The previous question addressed past experiences of academic freedom being challenged; the next question concerns whether respondents feel their academic freedom is currently challenged. Nearly one-third (30 percent) believe their own academic freedom is currently challenged, while 59 percent do not feel it is, and 11 percent are unsure (Figure 10). The proportion who are unsure is slightly higher among women than men, at 14 and 8 percent, respectively.
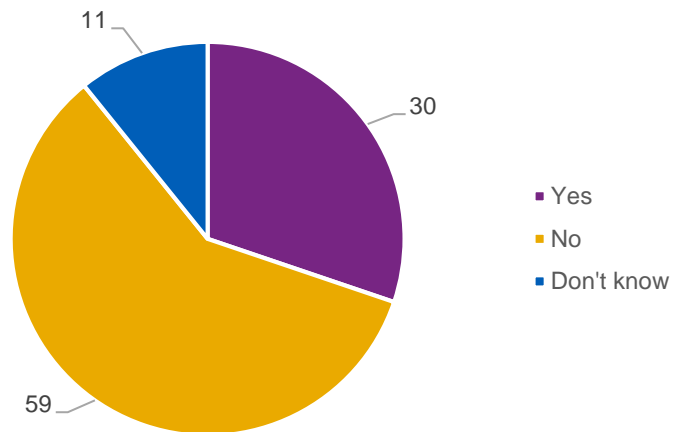
Figure 10: Response to the question, "Do you feel that your own academic freedom is currently being challenged?". Number of responses: 3,757. Percentages shown.

The percentage of individuals who feel their academic freedom is currently challenged is slightly higher within the social sciences and humanities and the arts compared to other research fields. Among educators, researchers, and doctoral students in the social sciences, 42 percent believe their academic freedom is challenged, which is not higher than in the humanities and the arts but is higher than in all other fields. In the humanities and the arts, 38 percent feel their academic freedom is challenged, a figure higher than in the natural sciences and medicine and health sciences but not higher than in engineering and technology or agricultural and veterinary sciences (Figure 11).

Percent
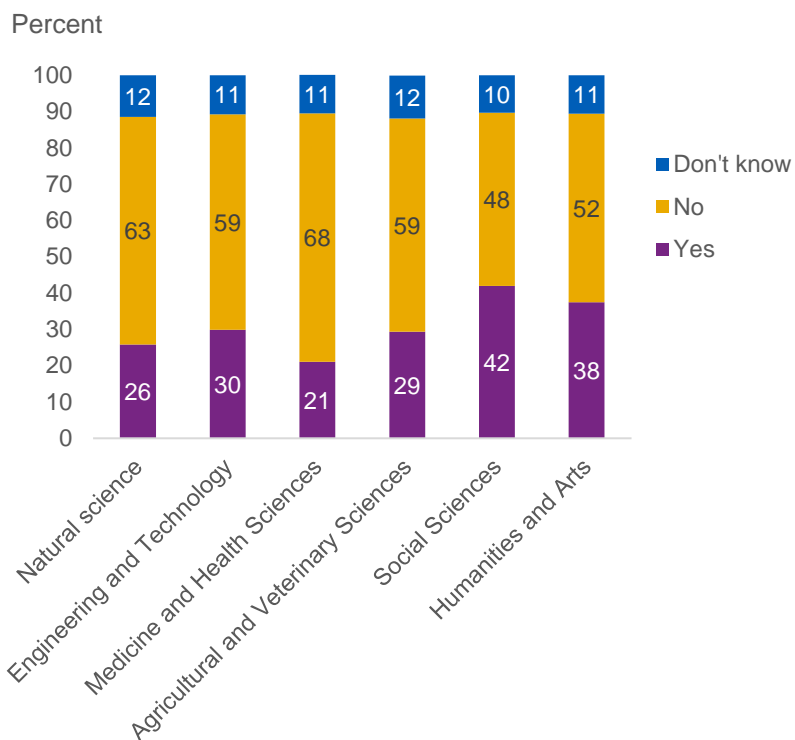
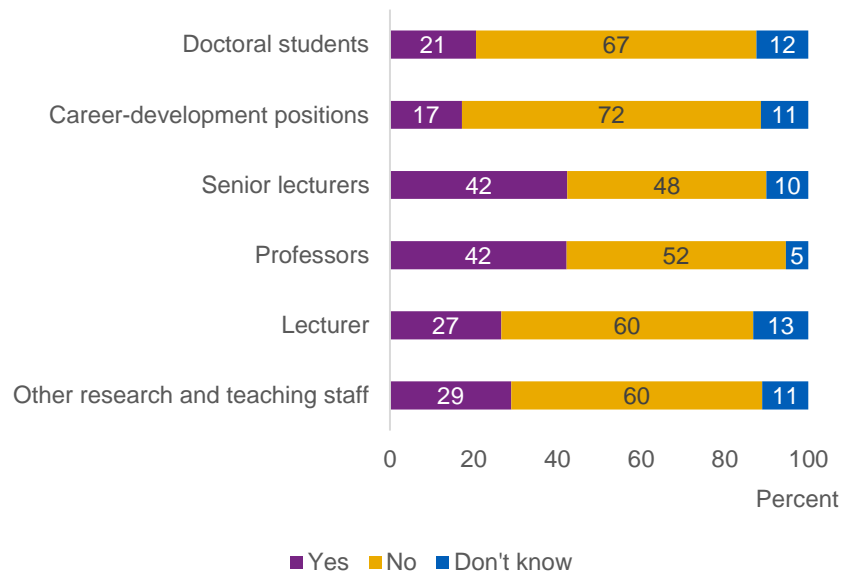*Figure 11: Responses to the question, "Do you feel that your own academic freedom is currently being challenged?" broken down by research field. Number of respondents: 614 (natural sciences), 522 (engineering and technology), 799 (medicine and health sciences), 324 (agriculture and veterinary medicine), 975 (social sciences), 507 (humanities and the arts).*

Professors and senior lecturers are more likely to feel their academic freedom is challenged compared to other employment categories. Among professors and senior lecturers, 42 percent feel their academic freedom is challenged, compared to 21 percent of doctoral students and 17 percent of those in career-development positions (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Responses to the question, "Do you feel that your own academic freedom is currently being challenged?" broken down by employment category. Number of respondents: 842 (doctoral student), 338 (career-development position), 975 (senior lecturer), 616 (professor), 506 (lecturer), 480 (other teaching and research staff).

Respondents who believe their academic freedom is challenged were asked who or what entities challenge it – whether they are internal or external actors. Sixteen percent believe the challenges come from individuals or groups within their institution, 35 percent from external entities, while 49 percent feel it is a mix of both (Figure 13).
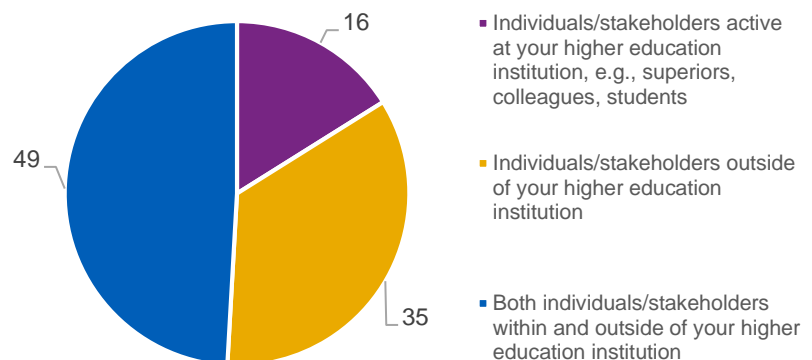
Figure 13: Responses to the question, "Where is the threats to your academic freedom coming from?" This question was asked only to respondents who previously indicated that their academic freedom is challenged. Number of responses: 1,190. Percentages shown.

Those involved in both research and teaching who felt their academic freedom was challenged were also asked if the challenge was linked to their research or teaching. Forty-seven percent feel it is challenged in relation to research, 4 percent in relation to teaching, and 49 percent in relation to both research and teaching. This shows that academic freedom is far more often felt to be challenged in research rather than in teaching (Figure 14).
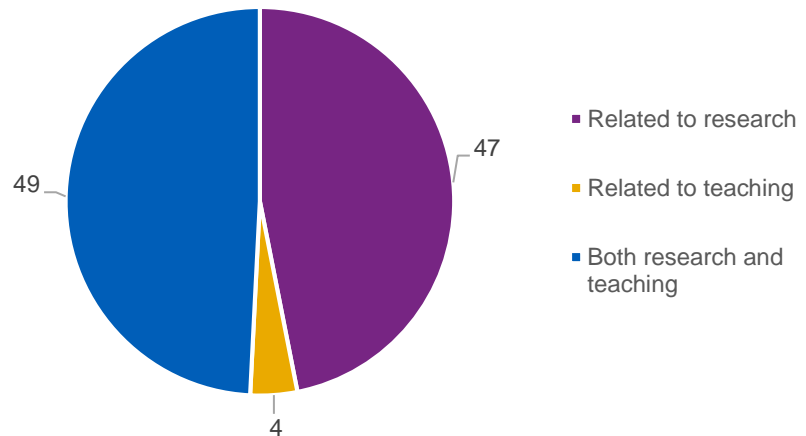

Figure 14: Responses to the question, "Is the challenges to your academic freedom related to research or teaching?" This question was asked only to respondents who previously indicated their academic freedom is challenged and who are involved in both research and teaching. Number of responses: 1,000. Percentages shown.

Support from the Institution

Among educators, researchers, and doctoral students who have felt their academic freedom challenged, nearly a quarter (23 percent) have sought support from their institution. Most, however, 71 percent, have not sought support (Figure 15).
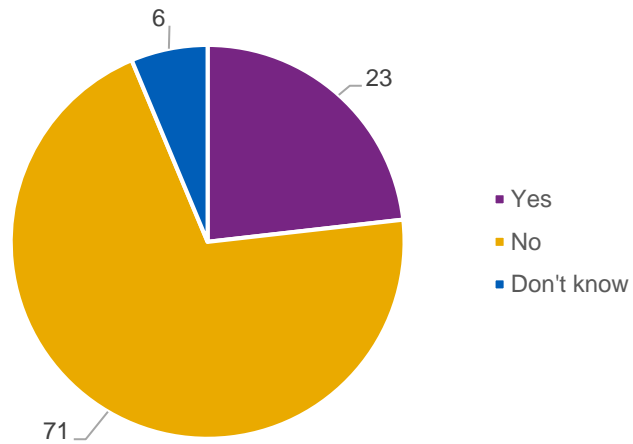
Figure 15: Responses to the question, "When you felt your academic freedom was challenged, did you seek support from your higher education institution?" This question was asked only to respondents who previously indicated that their academic freedom was challenged. Number of responses: 1,192. Percentages shown.

The survey also asked whether teachers, researchers, and doctoral students know where to turn when their academic freedom is challenged (Figure 31). Among those who feel their academic freedom is challenged and know where to seek help, a relatively high proportion, 58 percent, still did not seek support from their institution.

Of the 270 respondents who sought help when their academic freedom was challenged, 71 percent indicated they received some form of support. Of these, 17 percent felt the support was sufficient, and 54 percent felt it was insufficient. Just over a quarter, 27 percent, received no support from the institution at all (Figure 16).
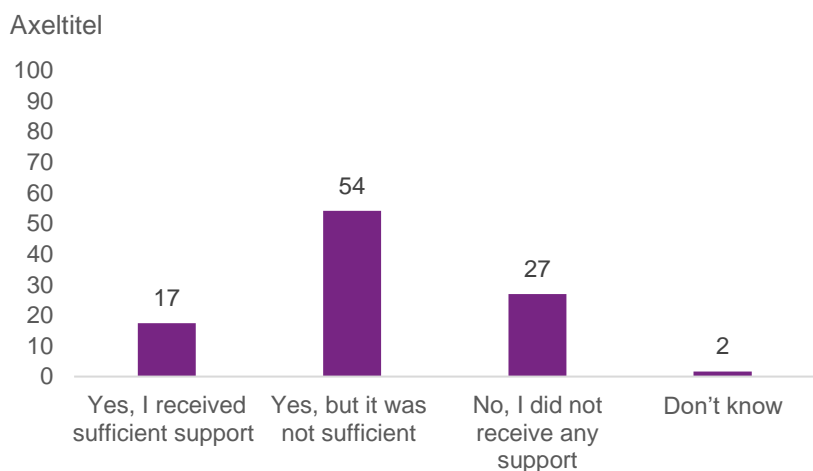

Figure 16: Responses to the question, "Did you receive support from your higher education institution when you asked for help?" This question was asked

only to respondents who sought support from their institution after experiencing a challenge to their academic freedom. Number of responses: 270.

Consequences When Academic Freedom is Challenged

How are researchers, educators, and doctoral students affected when they experience challenges to their academic freedom? The most common response is to change research focus. A third of respondents who indicated that their academic freedom had been challenged reported shifting their research focus as a result. Another common consequence is avoiding research on topics that may be perceived as controversial, a response given by a quarter of respondents. A quarter also reported no changes and continued as usual (Figure 17).
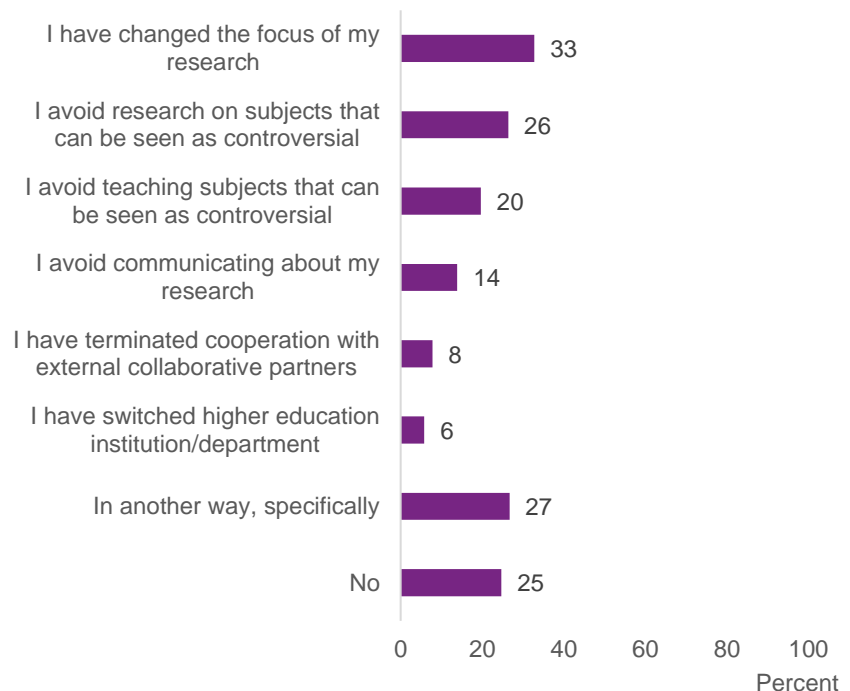

Figure 17: Responses to the question, "If you feel that your academic freedom has been challenged, did the experience cause you to change your behavior in any of the following ways?" Multiple responses allowed. Number of responses: 1,186.

There are some differences between educators, researchers, and doctoral students in various research fields in terms of how they have changed their behavior after experiencing challenges to their academic freedom. Shifting research focus, the most common response overall, is less common in the humanities and the arts compared to the natural sciences, engineering and technology, and agricultural and veterinary sciences (Figure 18).
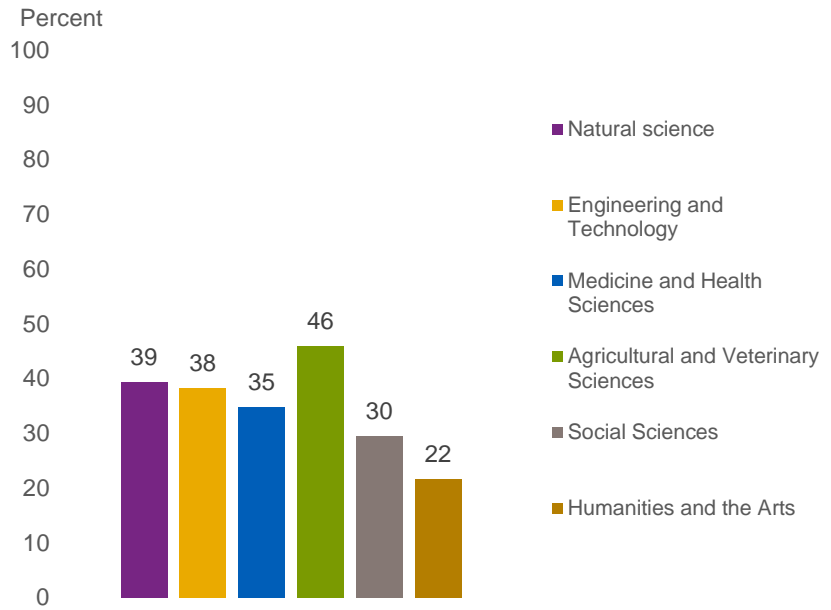
Percent

Figure 18: Responses to the question, "If you feel that your academic freedom has been challenged, did the experience cause you to change your behavior in any of the following ways? [I have changed the focus of my research]," broken down by research field. Number of responses: 168 (natural sciences), 167 (engineering and technology), 172 (medicine and health sciences), 100 (agriculture and veterinary medicine), 402 (social sciences), 176 (humanities and the arts).

Avoiding teaching topics that could be considered controversial is more common among those in the humanities and arts and social sciences than in other fields (Figure 19).
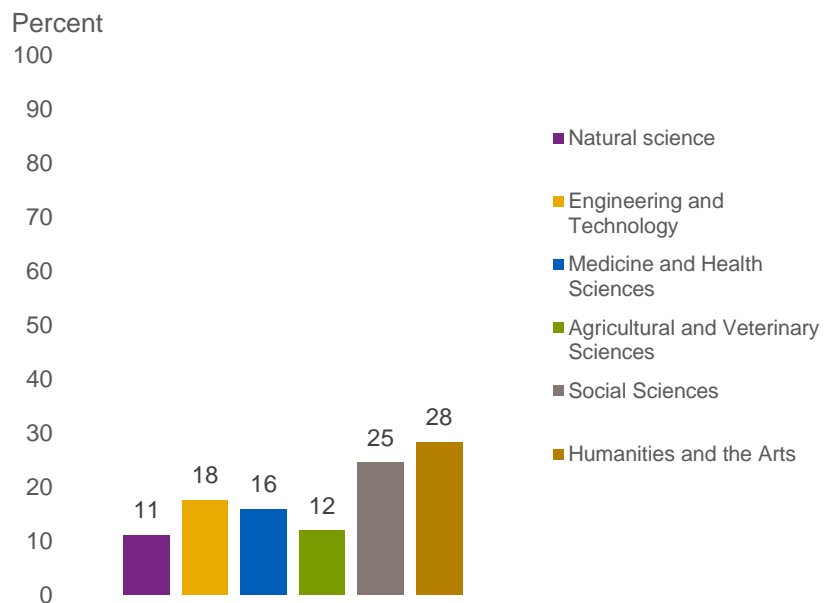
Percent

Figure 19: Responses to the question, "If you feel that your academic freedom has been challenged, did the experience cause you to change your behavior in any of the following ways? [I avoid teaching subjects that can be seen as controversial]," broken down by research field. Number of responses: 168 (natural sciences), 167 (engineering and technology), 172 (medicine and health sciences), 100 (agriculture and veterinary medicine), 402 (social sciences), 176 (humanities and the arts).

Twenty-seven percent indicated that they have changed their behavior in ways not listed in the six predefined options. These open-text responses were coded, categorized, and are shown in the word cloud in Figure 20.
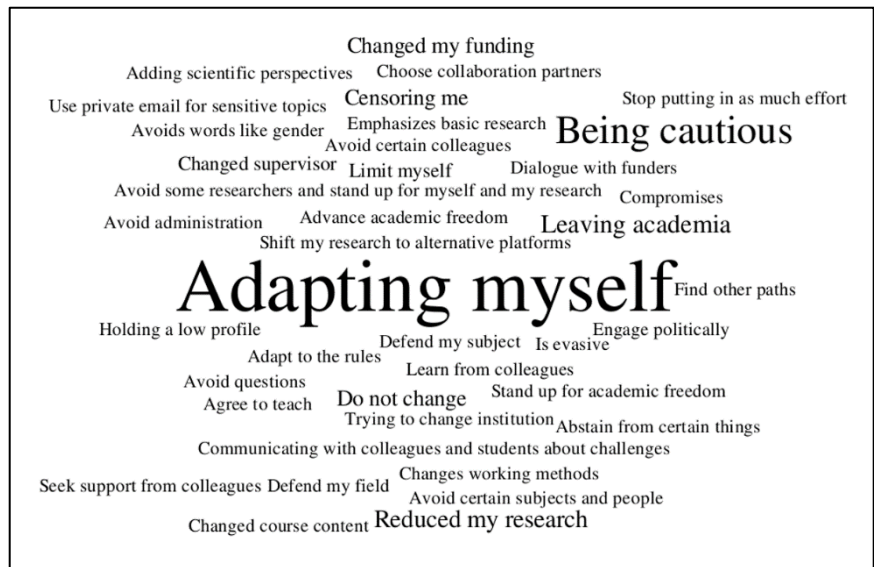

Figure 20: Responses to the question, "If you feel that your academic freedom has been challenged, did the experience cause you to change your behavior in any of the following ways? [In another way, specifically]." Responses have been coded and categorized. The word cloud is based on 242 open-text responses. Categories displayed with larger text were more frequently mentioned.

The most common response beyond the six predefined options (see Figure 17) was to adapt in some way, with one-third indicating this. This may involve generally adjusting to manage circumstances:

"Trying to adapt to prevailing circumstances and find pragmatic solutions that protect academic freedom."

"I comply and deliver what is expected."

Some respondents describe adapting specific aspects of their research, such as modifying strategies for funding applications or collaboration, while others avoid certain research areas:

"I have had to adjust my research focus and include strategically important individuals."

"I avoid applying for funding on certain topics."

"I avoid applying for external funding (e.g. funding from the Swedish Research Council) for topics that may be seen as controversial."

Others describe adapting their approach to communicating their research, finding alternative channels, or even avoiding sharing their work. Many also mention adapting their teaching approach. Some voices from the open-text responses include:

"I've also become more cautious about disseminating my research. For example, I no longer allow students to download my educational material or record my lectures since I can't control its spread."

"Adjusted syllabi and course content."

"I'm more reserved about sharing certain teaching materials."

"I don't avoid teaching controversial topics, but I have to weigh my words much more carefully than I would like."

Many respondents say they have become more cautious in some way. This often involves being careful with their wording, both with colleagues and in teaching situations, as well as in communicating their research. Some voices from the open-text responses include:

"Being cautious about what I discuss with colleagues."

"I carefully consider how I express myself. I don't want to risk being labeled left-wing and draw attention from the right-wing groups, or vice versa."

Other common responses include reducing their research activity or considering leaving academia altogether:

"Doing less research."

"The research process has slowed, and inspiration has waned to some extent."

"Retired early."

"I'm considering leaving academia."

Knowledge about Academic Freedom

Just over half of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students (53 percent) feel they have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom for their role. A quarter (25 percent) feel they lack this knowledge, while almost as many (22 percent) are unsure if they have sufficient knowledge (Figure 21).
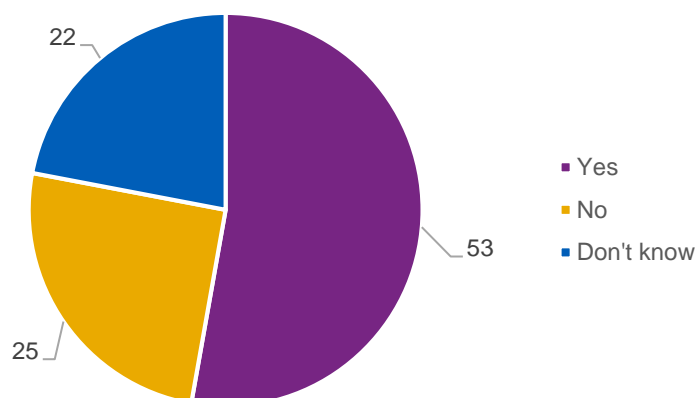
Figure 21. Response to the question, "Do you think you have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom in your position as a researcher/teacher?" Number of respondents: 3,756. Percentages shown in figure.

There are differences between men and women, with men more likely to answer "yes" and women more likely to answer "no" (Figure 22).
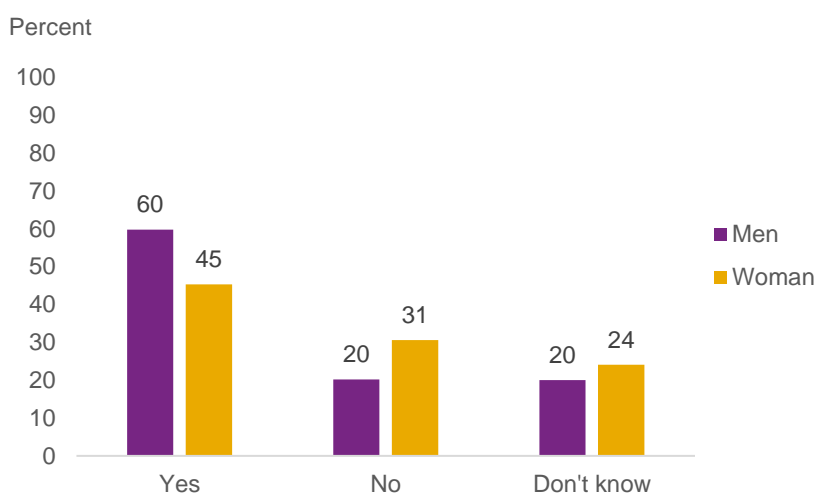

Figure 22. Response to the question, "Do you think you have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom in your position as a researcher/teacher?" Number of respondents: 1,829 (men), 1,927 (women).

Differences also exist across employment categories. Among professors, four out of five (79 percent) feel they have sufficient knowledge about academic freedom, which is higher than in all other employment categories. Among senior lecturers and the category other teaching and research staff, a relatively high proportion also feel they have sufficient knowledge, at 63 and 60 percent respectively, which is higher than among doctoral students, lecturers, and staff in career-development positions (Figure 23).
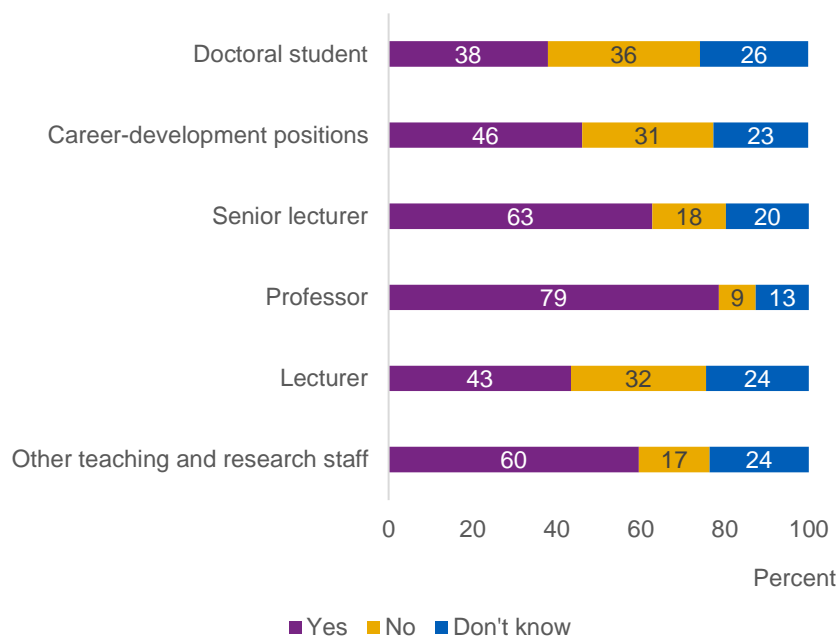
Figure 23. Response to the question, "Do you think you have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom in your position as a researcher/teacher?" Number of respondents: 843 (doctoral students), 337 (career-development position), 975 (senior lecturers), 613 (professors), 506 (lecturers), 482 (other research and teaching staff).

The gender difference is evident across all research fields, with men more often answering "yes" (Figure 24).
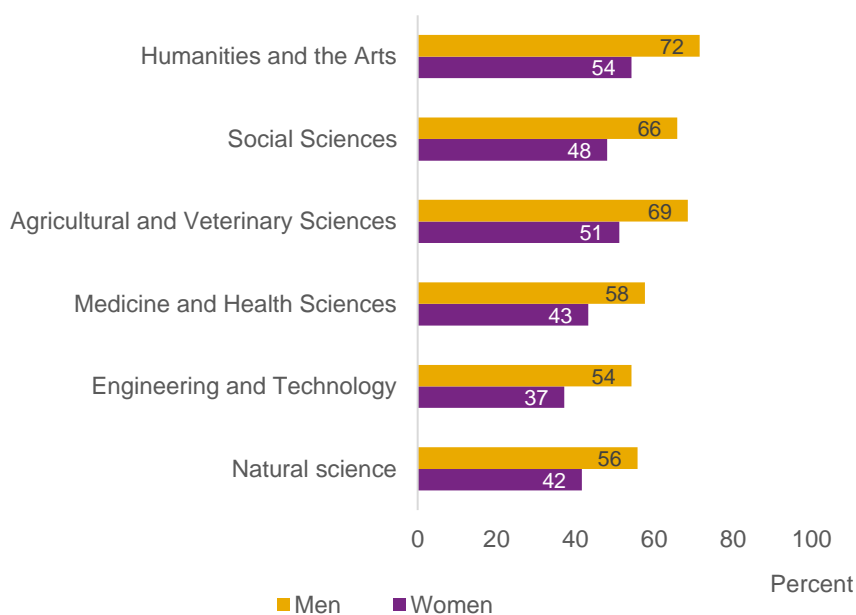

Figure 24. Percentage responding "yes" to the question, "Do you think you have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom in your position as a

researcher/teacher?" divided by gender and research field. Number of respondents: 390 (men, natural sciences), 291 (men, engineering and technology), 314 (men, medicine and health sciences), 148 (men, agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine), 445 (men, social sciences), 237 (men, humanities and the arts), 224 (women, natural sciences), 232 (women, engineering and technology), 483 (women, medicine and health sciences), 175 (women, agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine), 530 (women, social sciences), 271 (women, humanities and the arts).

Three-quarters (68 percent) would like to learn more about academic freedom, while about one-fifth (19 percent) would not (Figure 25).
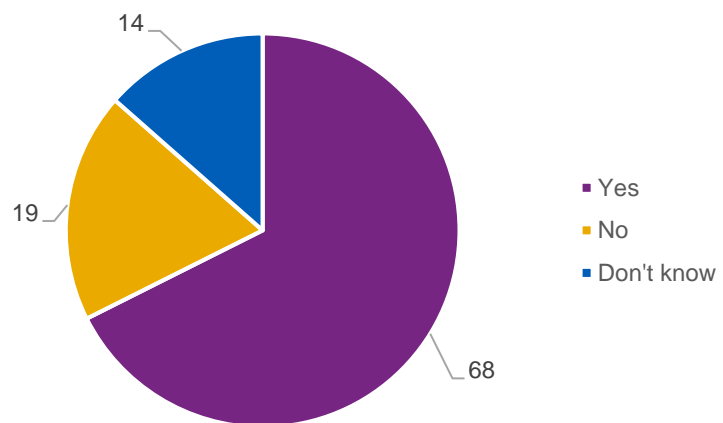

Figure 25. Response to the question, "Would you like to learn more about academic freedom?" Number of respondents: 3,758. Percentages shown in figure.

There is also a clear gender difference here, with women more likely to want to learn more about academic freedom – 75 percent of women want to learn more, compared to 61 percent of men (Figure 26).
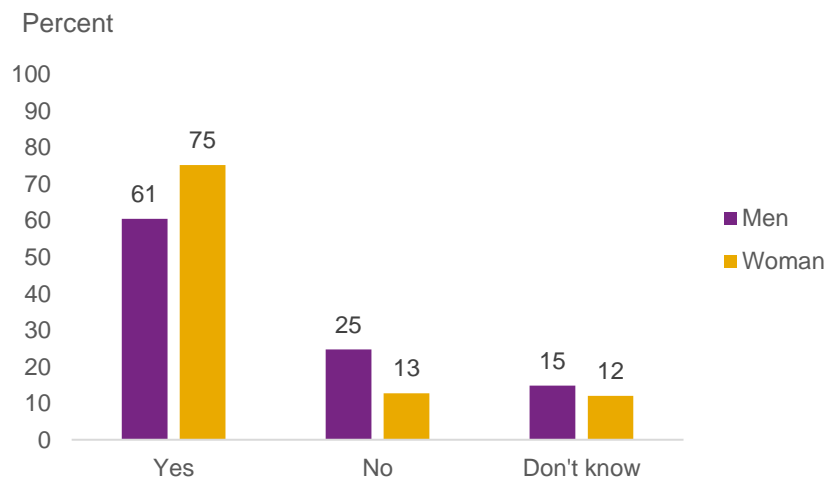
Figure 26. Response to the question, "Would you like to learn more about academic freedom?" by gender. Number of respondents: 1,831 (men), 1,927 (women).

There are no differences between research fields, but some differences exist across employment categories. Professors stand out by showing less interest in learning more about academic freedom compared to others (Figure 27).
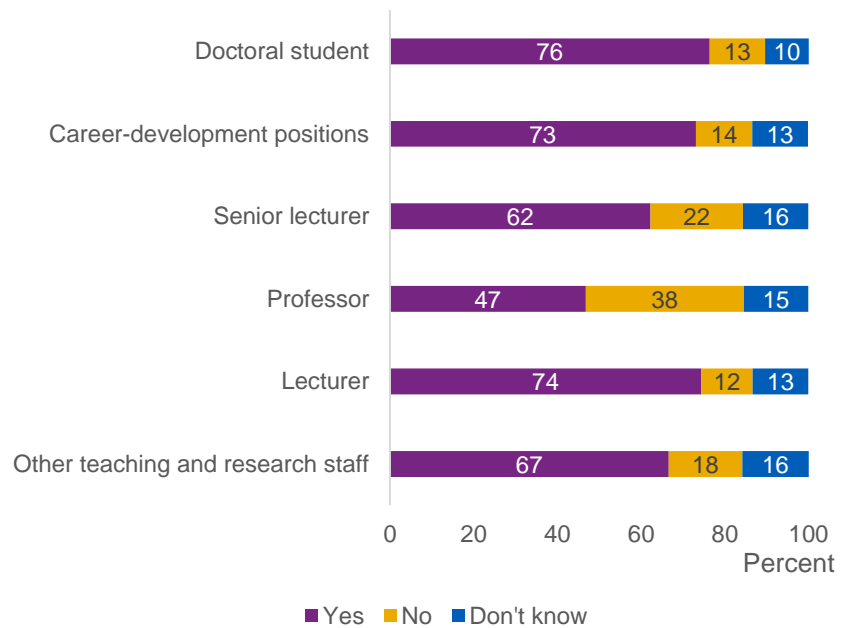
Figure 27. Response to the question, "Would you like to learn more about academic freedom?" by employment category. Number of respondents: 841 (doctoral students), 337 (career-development position), 975 (senior lecturers), 617 (professors), 506 (lecturers), 482 (other research and teaching staff).

Just over half (57 percent) report never having been offered a course or training covering aspects of academic freedom. Eight percent have been offered and attended such a course or training, while 5 percent were offered but did not attend (Figure 28).

Figure 28. Response to the question, "Has your current higher education institution ever offered courses/training you can attend that includes aspects of academic freedom?" Number of respondents: 3,757. Percentages shown in figure.

Doctoral students have been offered and attended courses and training on this topic more frequently than individuals in other employment categories, except professors. Lecturers stand out, with a relatively high proportion not reporting any offer of a course or training related to academic freedom – 67 percent of adjuncts say they have not been offered this type of course or training, which is higher than in other employment categories, except for senior lecturers. The difference between lecturers and senior lecturers is not statistically significant (Figure 29).

Doctoral student	12	5	52	32
Career-development positions	5	7	53	35
Senior lecturer	7	5	61	27
Professor	8	7	55	30
Lecturer	6	5	67	22
Other teaching and research staff	7	6	56	32

- Yes, I have been offered such courses/training and have participated
- Yes, I have been offered such courses/training but have not participated
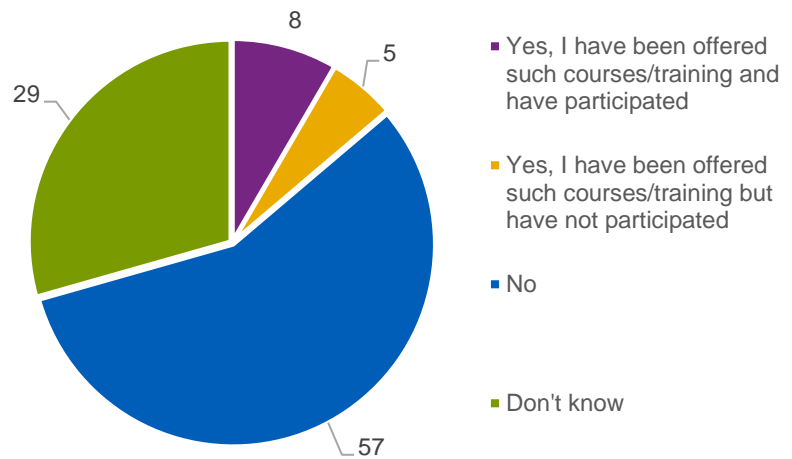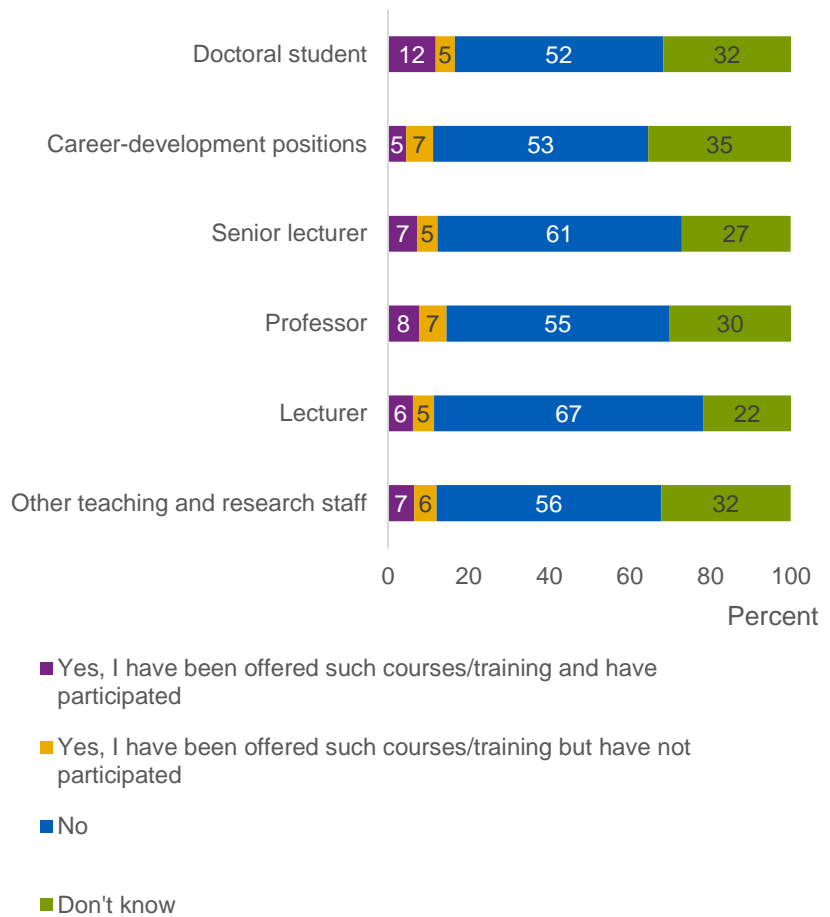- No
- Don't know

Figure 29. Response to the question, "Has your current higher education institution ever offered courses/training you can attend that includes aspects of academic freedom?" by employment category. Number of respondents: 843 (doctoral students), 333 (career-development position), 975 (senior lecturers), 615 (professors), 506 (lecturers), 482 (other research and teaching staff).

Institutional Efforts to Support Academic Freedom

Twelve percent of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students feel their current institution actively works to protect their academic freedom to a high extent. Thirty-six percent feel that the institution does so to a certain extent, 22 percent to a low extent, and 9 percent feel that the institution does not work actively to protect their academic freedom at all. Twenty-one percent responded "don't know" (Figure 30).
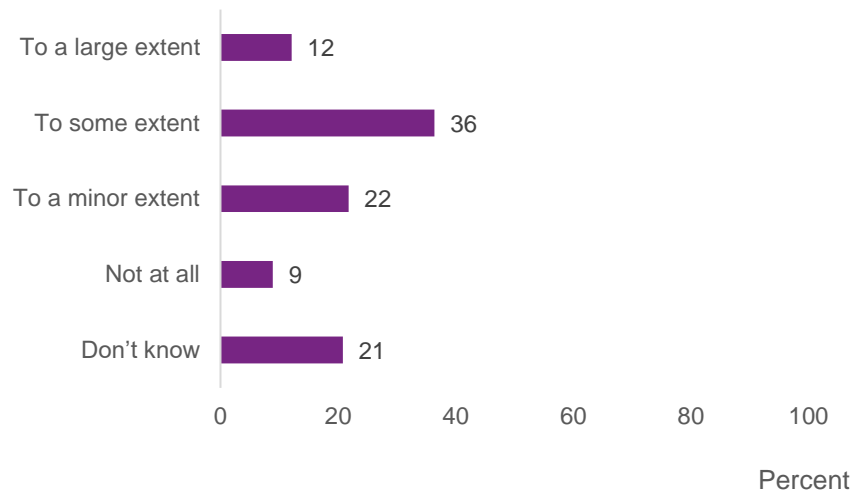
Figure 30. Response to the question, "To what extent do you feel your current institution (e.g., through your department) actively works to protect your academic freedom?" Number of respondents: 3,760.

Just over one-third (35 percent) know where to turn within their institution if their academic freedom is challenged. Half (52 percent) do not know where to turn (Figure 31).

Figure 31. Response to the question, "Do you know where to turn at your current higher education institution if your academic freedom is challenged?" Number of respondents: 3,756.

Men are more likely to know where to turn if their academic freedom is challenged, as are professors (Figure 32).

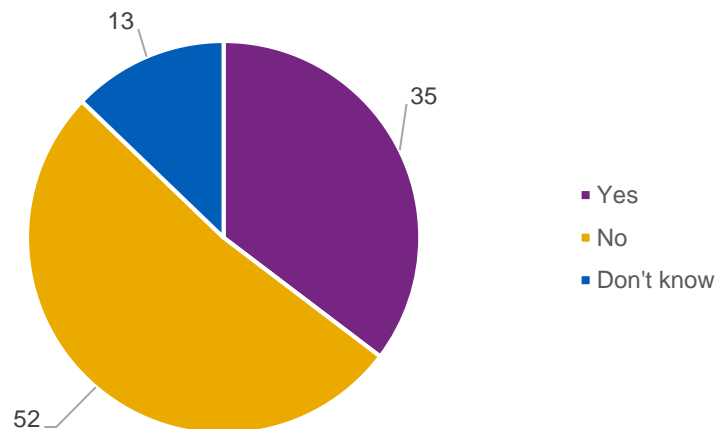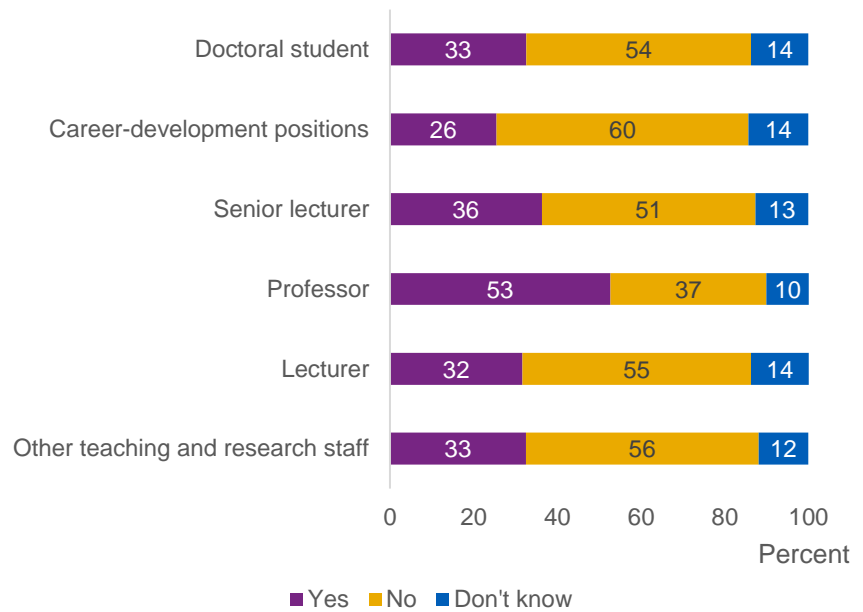|	Yes	No	Don't know
Doctoral student	33	54	14
Career-development positions	26	60	14
Senior lecturer	36	51	13
Professor	53	37	10
Lecturer	32	55	14
Other teaching and research staff	33	56	12

Figure 32. Response to the question, "Do you know where to turn at your current higher education institution if your academic freedom is challenged?" by employment category. Number of respondents: 843 (doctoral students), 337 (career-development position), 973 (senior lecturers), 614 (professors), 506 (lecturers), 483 (other research and teaching staff).

The Academic Culture

The survey also included questions about experiences within the academic culture. These questions addressed potential situations that respondents might have encountered in their academic routines and whether they experienced them or not. If respondents had experienced the situation, they were then asked whether they felt it challenged their academic freedom.

The questions were divided into two parts – experiences in the research environment and experiences in the teaching environment. Table 2 presents responses to questions related to the research environment, while Table 3 covers responses about the teaching environment.

Table 2. Responses to 11 questions about academic culture related to the research environment. The questions focused on situations that could potentially arise in connection with research. If respondents answered that they had experienced the situation, a follow-up question asked whether they felt it challenged their academic freedom.

Have you experienced …	Yes (%)	No (%)	Number of responses	If YES, has this challenged your academic freedom, i.e., your ability to freely search for and disseminate knowledge?		
				Yes (%)	No (%)	Number of responses
… that informal networks and bonds of friendship exist at your workplace that homogenize research and academic discussions?	46	54	3,368	35	65	1,510
... that colleagues at your workplace do not permit ideas and perspectives in the research environment that challenge consensus?	29	71	3,382	45	55	1,013
… pressure from colleagues at your workplace which censors your research findings?	15	85	3,376	65	35	473
… pressure from a stakeholder outside of academia which censors your research findings?	9	91	3,366	66	34	331
… pressure not to disseminate your research findings?	7	93	3,366	70	30	265
… threats and/or hateful comments related to your research expressed in letters, emails, phone calls or on social media?	7	93	3,370	51	49	271
… pressure from colleagues at your workplace which censors your research findings?	5	95	3,376	77	23	139
… that your department or higher education institution refused to approve your application for research funding on, in your opinion, arbitrary grounds?	4	96	3,361	77	23	110
… that someone has contacted your employer to prevent you from conducting your research?	3	97	3,368	65	35	116
… that colleagues have discredited you regarding your research, such as on social media?	3	97	3,364	64	36	99
… pressure, such as through agreements, from another country that censors your research findings?	2	98	3,362	65	35	67

The most commonly reported situations associated with the research environment were those linked to the academic community and the collegial environment. The most frequently experienced situation was that research and academic discussions became homogeneous due to informal networks and friendships, with 46 percent of respondents having experienced this. This aligns with previous findings where teachers, researchers, and doctoral students identified conformity, homogenization, and uniformity as challenges to academic freedom in Swedish higher education institutions.

The second most common situation was that colleagues did not provide space for ideas and perspectives challenging the consensus in the

research environment, experienced by 29 percent of respondents. A significant number, 15 percent, also reported pressure from colleagues to change their research question or methodology against their will.

Notably, the proportion of those who felt these experiences challenged their academic freedom varied widely. Of those who experienced a homogeneous academic environment, 35 percent felt it challenged their academic freedom. By comparison, 45 percent of those who felt that colleagues did not allow space for diverse ideas and perspectives saw it as a threat to their academic freedom, while 65 percent of those who experienced pressure from colleagues to change research topics or methods felt their freedom was challenged.

Seven percent reported experiencing threats and/or harassment related to their research via mail, email, phone, or social media. There was no difference between men and women, but certain differences appeared across fields, with this experience more common in social sciences and humanities and the arts (11 percent) compared to 6 percent in natural sciences, 4 percent in engineering and technology, and 3 percent in medicine and health sciences. In agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine, the proportion was 8 percent, slightly higher than in medicine and health sciences, although these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 3. Responses to 8 questions about academic culture related to the teaching environment. The questions focused on situations that could potentially arise in connection with teaching. If respondents answered that they had experienced the situation, a follow-up question asked whether they felt it challenged their academic freedom.

				If YES, has this challenged your academic freedom, i.e., your ability to freely search for and disseminate knowledge?		
Have you experienced …	*Yes (%)*	*No (%)*	*Number of responses*	*Yes (%)*	*No (%)*	*Number of responses*
... that students exert pressure to remove or add course content from your course?	21	79	3,170	44	56	643
… students who do not accept that the learning environment is to be characterized by open discussion?	17	83	3,161	45	55	542
… that one or more students have submitted complaints about you because of your teaching?	9	91	3,160	34	66	257
… threats and/or hateful comments related to your teaching expressed in letters, emails, phone calls or on social media?	8	93	3,164	39	61	237
… pressure from your colleagues to change how you conduct your teaching?	8	92	3,158	54	47	255
… that your employer does not support you when you have been harassed or discredited by students?	7	93	3,153	53	48	201

… pressure from your immediate superior to change how you conduct your teaching?	5	92	3,155	56	44	226
… that students have discredited you in your role as a teacher, such as on social media?	4	96	3,164	49	51	122

The situation most commonly encountered in the teaching environment was students exerting pressure to remove or add content to a course. One in five teachers (21 percent) reported experiencing this. It was particularly common among lecturers, with 33 percent having experienced it, higher than in other employment categories. There were no notable differences across research fields; 25 percent in social sciences and 24 percent in humanities and the arts reported experiencing this, compared to 15 percent in natural sciences and agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine.

The second most common situation was students not accepting that the learning environment should be characterized by open dialogue. Seventeen percent reported experiencing this, with a clear difference across research fields. Among social sciences and humanities and arts staff, 23 percent experienced this, compared to 10 percent in natural sciences, 12 percent in engineering and technology, 15 percent in medicine and health sciences, and 11 percent in agricultural sciences and veterinary medicine.

Senior lecturers and lectures experienced resistance to open dialogue in the classroom more often, with 25 and 22 percent, respectively, having faced this, compared to other employment categories. Among senior lecturers in social sciences, 30 percent had experienced this, as did 29 percent of lectures in social sciences and 28 percent of senior lecturers in humanities and arts.

More women than men reported experiencing threats and/or harassment related to teaching; 9 percent of women compared to 6 percent of men reported this. For other situations, there were no gender differences.

Notably, 3 percent of researchers reported that colleagues participated in harassment campaigns against them, for example, on social media. While uncommon, this aligns with findings suggesting the presence of conformity and uniformity within the academic community.

Are There Other Challenges to Academic Freedom?

As a follow-up, respondents were asked if their academic freedom had been challenged in any other way. Twenty-one percent said it had, resulting in 851 open-text responses.

As with previous questions about challenges to academic freedom, responses varied widely. Major challenges previously identified also appeared here. The most common response was that their academic

freedom had been challenged due to research funding. Many also cited conformity, ideological homogeneity, or a lack of discussion as threats to academic freedom. This theme reappeared in the survey results, with respondents mentioning that certain topics or perspectives could not be raised, were ignored, or were suppressed. Some noted that this led to self-censorship, creating a false appearance of consensus arising from a narrow discussion climate.

Since this question focused on academic culture, responses often centered on workplace culture and day-to-day academic life. Several respondents mentioned being questioned or poorly treated by colleagues or supervisors in ways that challenged their academic freedom, such as exclusion or being ignored due to their opinions or scientific work, as well as facing workplace issues. Some responses included:

"I'm allowed to pursue my thesis, but I don't get the same support from my advisors as other doctoral students because they dislike that I challenge a theory they believe in."

"My opinion is simply ignored in discussions."

"My supervisor opposes my research."

"Bullying."

Several responses also touched on teaching in ways not previously mentioned in the survey, such as lack of funding and pressure from industry:

"Pressure from clinical settings to adjust course content to fit a streamlined, cost-effective care model."

"Institutional budget cuts primarily impact teaching, limiting the ability to integrate new knowledge, which in the short- and long-term challenges academic freedom."

Another recurring theme was that lack of time for teaching could challenge academic freedom, as nuanced discussions require more planning. When time for teaching is insufficient, the quality of academic dialogue suffers:

"I have less and less time to teach a subject, leading to simplifications. I also lack time to keep up with research or develop new course content, forcing me to avoid teaching topics that I believe would be valuable."

A number of respondents reported that when conflicts or disagreements arise with students, leadership or supervisors often take the students' side rather than supporting the teacher:

"In conflicts with students over grades or course content, I've experienced situations where students who insulted or verbally attacked me were neither disciplined nor corrected by the program director, HR, or anyone else in administration. This has led me to avoid controversial topics and start giving higher grades to avoid backlash."

The open-text responses also show that some respondents desire a nuanced view of academic freedom. Some believe that while academic freedom is sometimes challenged, testing boundaries and re-evaluating established viewpoints is a necessary part of academic dialogue:

"The questions are a bit tricky to answer – of course there are proposals from both students and colleagues to change the teaching; that's what we call course development. We have course evaluations after each course, and students can be fairly critical of elements they dislike. Colleagues also have opinions to the extent that they are affected by either teaching methods or course progression. However, this doesn't necessarily have to be a "problem"."

UKÄ's Observations

In this section, UKÄ presents its general observations based on survey responses.

Academic Freedom – A Prerequisite for Researchers and Teachers

UKÄ notes that there is broad agreement among the teachers, researchers, and doctoral students who responded to the survey that academic freedom is an important prerequisite for their work. This is consistent across all groups within academia. Although there are some small differences between research fields and professional categories, there is strong consensus regarding the importance of academic freedom in academic everyday life.

Challenges to Academic Freedom at Swedish Higher Education Institutions

Half of the teachers, researchers, and doctoral students believe that academic freedom at Swedish institutions is currently challenged. Differences appear across research fields, with those in the humanities and the arts and in social sciences being more likely to feel that academic freedom is under threat. These differences are robust, remaining significant in multivariate analyses even when controlling for other factors like gender, age, and job category. There are also notable differences between job categories, with senior lecturers and professors more frequently perceiving academic freedom as challenged.

While it might be surprising that half of respondents see academic freedom as challenged, this must be understood in light of what they identify as the main challenges. In open-text responses, respondents described a range of factors they view as threats. These challenges are perceived to originate both within and outside academia, affecting both teaching and research. Although a wide range of issues is cited, some clear patterns emerge. The most commonly mentioned threats are political influence and the structure of the research funding system. Often, these factors are intertwined, with political influence manifesting through funding mechanisms, such as targeted calls and strategic initiatives. Another recurring factor is the ethical review process. Notably, all these factors – cited by a large proportion of respondents – primarily concern structural or political issues rather than individual academic freedom or the relationship between the individual and the institution, and thus fall outside the scope of this government commission. From the perspective of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students, the main challenges to academic freedom at Swedish institutions are political and structural factors, as well as conflicts with other legislation.

There are also challenges directly related to the academic community and environment. Many teachers, researchers, and doctoral students refer to conformity and uniformity within universities and university colleges, where individuals are reluctant to stand out. This can lead to avoiding certain topics in discussions, even if they are personally considered important. Some feel that the academic environment has become increasingly restrictive over time. In some cases, this is related to the funding system, where researchers may choose the "safe" middle ground to secure funding, but it can also reflect the broader academic environment and discourse at Swedish institutions.

The challenges to academic freedom, as reported in the open-text responses, are varied. Some factors are less common but still clearly present, such as harassment and threats, often from external actors and via social media. Researchers express a sense that there are many people in society with strong views on what should or should not be researched and how it should be done, which underpins the harassment and threats they face. An expressed demand for clear and quick results in research is seen as a challenge to academic freedom. There is also concern about a decreasing level of collegial governance and decision-making at institutions. Some describe a shift toward more hierarchical management and elements of New Public Management, which they see as a challenge to academic freedom at higher education institutions.

The academic freedom of teachers, researchers, and doctoral students

UKÄ notes that significantly fewer individuals feel their own academic freedom is challenged. While half perceive academic freedom as

generally challenged, just under a third feel that their own academic freedom is challenged. The reasons for this difference are speculative, but it could be that individuals have heard of incidents affecting colleagues, or learned about challenges through the media. Another possibility is that they perceive issues with political influence or the funding system but feel less personally impacted by these factors.

Few Seek Support from Their Institution When Academic Freedom Is Challenged

What happens when a researcher or teacher's academic freedom is challenged? The survey results show that few seek support from their institution. Among those who feel their academic freedom is currently challenged, just under a quarter (23 percent) have sought support. Seventy-one percent have not. Even among those who know where to turn within the institution (which was also a survey question), a strikingly high proportion – 58 percent – have not sought institutional support. This indicates that even those aware of support mechanisms often choose not to use them, suggesting that cases where academic freedom is challenged might not reach institutional awareness. Notably, of those who sought support, only 17 percent felt they received sufficient assistance. Half received support but found it inadequate.

Consequences When Academic Freedom Is Challenged

Three-quarters of those who feel their academic freedom has been challenged report some form of behavioral change in response. The most common response is to shift research focus and avoid researching potentially controversial topics. Less common, but still notable, changes include avoiding public communication of their research or terminating collaborations with external partners. This is noteworthy as it impedes institutions from conducting research and education in collaboration with the surrounding community. It should also be noted that many respondents indicate they have consciously chosen not to alter their roles as researchers and teachers, stating that they "stand their ground" or actively defend their academic freedom.

A Clear Desire for More Knowledge on Academic Freedom

UKÄ observes that many respondents express a lack of knowledge and expertise on academic freedom. Seven out of ten express a desire to learn more about the topic. When asked if they had been offered any course or training on aspects of academic freedom, 13 percent said yes. More than half said no, and a relatively large proportion, 29 percent, answered "don't know." The high proportion of "don't know" responses may suggest that academic freedom is a multifaceted concept that permeates

many areas of academic life. It is conceivable that few courses explicitly address academic freedom but may include aspects of it, making the question difficult to answer. It could also reflect a lack of understanding of what academic freedom entails, making the question challenging to answer.

Few Know Where Support Is Located

Researchers, teachers, and doctoral students generally have a positive perception of their institution's efforts to promote and protect academic freedom. However, even though they are aware of institutional efforts, only 35 percent know where to turn if their academic freedom is challenged, while half do not. Institutions have an opportunity here to clarify and communicate the available resources and support for those who feel their academic freedom is under threat.

The Academic Culture

The survey presented various situations that may arise in everyday academic life and potentially be seen as challenging to academic freedom. The most commonly experienced situations related to the research environment involve the academic community and collegial culture. The most frequently reported situation was that research and academic discussions became homogeneous due to informal networks and friendships, experienced by 46 percent of respondents. This aligns with responses in other parts of the survey.

UKÄ also notes that 2 percent of Sweden's teachers, researchers, and doctoral students have experienced pressure from another country, for example, through agreements, to censor their research findings. This figure should be viewed with the understanding that only a small proportion likely work in fields and contexts where this is possible.

Finally, UKÄ notes a variation in whether respondents view these situations as challenges to academic freedom. Overall, there is no overarching consensus on whether the described situations challenge academic freedom. Among the 19 situations, between 34 and 77 percent felt they posed a challenge to academic freedom. In many cases, responses were evenly split, reflecting varied perspectives where some feel these situations challenge academic freedom while others do not. This may stem from differing views on what academic freedom entails or from the fact that some researchers and teachers feel they can resist such challenges, thereby preserving their academic freedom.

Case Studies

As part of its assignment, UKÄ was tasked with conducting case studies to gain a deeper understanding of how institutions work to promote and safeguard academic freedom, as well as individuals' experiences of these efforts. The goal is for the case studies to exemplify and illustrate aspects of academic freedom and what happens when it is challenged or at risk of being challenged. The aspects of academic freedom explored through these case studies are also reflected in the responses from institutions and in survey answers.

This chapter begins with a description of the methodology, data collection, and ethical reflections. It is followed by the presentation of the four case studies and the lessons UKÄ has drawn from them.

Conducting the Case Studies

In this project, case studies have been defined as a qualitative method in which specific cases are used to focus on particular events that illustrate more general principles. Case studies here also serve as a learning tool for higher education institutions.

In accordance with the methodology definition, the selection of the four case studies was conducted to illustrate:

- Occasions and ways academic freedom can be challenged or at risk of being challenged.

- Institutions' work in promoting and safeguarding academic freedom.

- How involved individuals perceive the effectiveness of institutions' efforts to promote and safeguard academic freedom in practice.

These cases should not be seen as exhaustive descriptions of all aspects of the points above but as examples and illustrations of them. The results from the case studies on academic freedom should also not be considered evaluations of specific events. Central to the method is allowing various actors' perspectives to illustrate how they experienced a specific event.

Selection of Case Studies

The pilot study showed that challenges to academic freedom can relate to both education and research and can originate either internally or

externally to institutions. The selected case studies align with these categories.

The selection process for the four case studies included the following steps:

1. Identification of themes and environments: During the pilot study, themes, events, and environments of value for in-depth exploration within the four categories (education, research, internal, and external challenges) were identified.

2. Establishing contact with institutions: Contact was established with institutions where relevant themes, events, or environments had been identified. The case studies were chosen to provide insights into how institutions promote and/or safeguard academic freedom in both education and research. The aim was to conduct case studies at different universities and faculties. The final selection was also influenced by the willingness of institutions, departments, and individuals to participate.

3. Selecting interview subjects: In dialogue with the relevant institutions, interviewees were selected for each case study. Interview subjects invited to participate were those deemed likely to have valuable insights for the case study.

The cases included in this assignment are those that have not been extensively covered in the media. Incidents already discussed in the public debate risk influencing both the interviewees' and interviewers' perceptions, so such cases were excluded.

Data Collection for the Case Studies

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method for the case studies. A semi-structured interview follows specified questions but allows the interviewer the flexibility to ask additional questions if necessary.

The interviews were based on two fundamental questions:

• How does the institution/department work to promote and safeguard academic freedom?

• How is the academic freedom challenged?

Specific question areas were then formulated to capture the core of each particular case.

Interviewees received the questions in advance to allow them to prepare. Most interviews took place at the relevant institution, with the majority being individual interviews, although some were conducted in groups of

up to five participants. Each interview involved 2–4 representatives from UKÄ.

Ethical Considerations

The pilot study revealed that situations where individual academic freedom is challenged often coincide with significant negative impacts on individuals' work environments. The challenging and sometimes personal experiences of individuals thus became part of the data collection for the case studies.

Interviewing individuals involved in work environment issues requires special competence and conditions that guarantee confidentiality. UKÄ could not fully meet these two criteria, which required interviewers to adopt a heightened awareness and sensitivity. The approach to data collection aimed to respect the individuals who agreed to be interviewed, with particular attention given to their personal integrity.

In the process of identifying suitable case studies, some potential interviewees chose not to participate, even though they felt the topic was important, because they perceived the personal cost of participation to be too high. For example, there were concerns about possible repercussions from within the institution or external parties. Some interviewees indicated that they could not face the emotional toll of return to certain experiences. However, among those who declined, some emphasized the importance of showing why they chose not to participate: the vulnerability of an individual teacher, researcher, or doctoral student in situations where academic freedom is challenged.

Promoting Academic Freedom in Everyday Work – Case Study 1

Case Study 1 illustrates a department's efforts to create a culture that promotes and safeguards academic freedom in both research and teaching. The purpose of this case study is to show how an academic culture can develop and take shape through daily interactions among colleagues. How is the foundation for a healthy academic discourse established within a department? How can a faculty and department leadership address challenges to academic freedom? Employees repeatedly emphasized the value of a lively seminar culture, functional collegiality, and the importance of nurturing independent researchers.

The department consists of more than 150 teachers, researchers, doctoral students, and administrative staff. The case study is based on 11 interviews with a total of 24 individuals. The interviewees represent department leadership, HR, study directors, research leaders, professors, senior lecturers, and doctoral students.

Introduction

In the preparatory statements for the academic freedom provision in Chapter 1, Section 6 of the Higher Education Act, the focus was on the responsibility of university leadership to protect academic freedom – that is, to promote a culture that allows free search and dissemination of knowledge. This case study shifts the focus to how a department actively works to create a culture that permits free search and dissemination of knowledge. Employees repeatedly highlighted the importance of maintaining a lively seminar culture, functional collegiality, and developing independent researchers.

The Seminar Culture and Collegial Responsibility

The research and teaching staff at the department in this case study describe an active seminar culture as crucial to fostering a strong academic environment. There is broad consensus on its importance. They conduct a range of seminars, including a general research seminar, a doctoral seminar, and seminars linked to various research groups. Participation in the department's general seminar is significant, and it is made clear that attendance is expected. Participation counts towards each faculty member, researcher, and doctoral student's annual performance evaluation.

Researchers and doctoral students consistently describe the tone across all types of seminars as direct and constructively critical, while also being open and encouraging. This tone extends to both internal

participants and invited guests, regardless of academic career stage, from new doctoral students to professors. There are two speaking lists – one for senior researchers and one for doctoral students – and the seminar leader alternates, giving doctoral students the floor every other turn to actively participate in the general seminar. The seminar is open to everyone, including the public, though visitors from outside academia have so far adhered to the academic standards of discussion focused on dialogue.

The general seminar has a primary organizer, a responsibility that rotates among department members, bringing a variety of topics to the discussions. Researchers and senior lecturers agree that this variety enhances both the department and individual researchers. They believe that significant meetings and research ideas emerge from the exchange between different subjects. Everyone is welcome to suggest guest speakers or seminar topics.

The research and teaching staff value an ongoing academic dialogue among researchers and research groups on broader, shared goals, especially regarding research quality. This shared dialogue drives the motivation to maintain a strong seminar culture. The focus is on common ground rather than differences. In the past, attempts to divide the department into smaller units or sections met resistance within the faculty, and the idea was ultimately not implemented.

According to interviews, many staff members choose to work at the office rather than from home, as they believe this contributes to a supportive, collaborative atmosphere where individual researchers can work freely and prosper. The academic environment fosters mutual assistance among colleagues, regardless of their career stage.

There are several successful research environments within the department, where a sense of community has been reinforced by research achievements. This sense of community is also present across the department as a whole. When a researcher deviates from the established discourse, colleagues sometimes comment on it. However, researchers also note frequent disagreements on topics such as curriculum design and doctoral admissions, yet they feel assured that everyone is motivated by a shared scientific foundation and commitment to the field. Not everyone shares this view; some researchers perceive the culture as conformist, leaving little room for alternative perspectives and viewpoints.

Historically, there have been academic conflicts between different researchers, but these have generally not become entrenched. Instead, they are handled through discussion and argumentation in the spirit of the seminar culture. The tradition of inviting opponents to debate rather than shutting down discussion is historically rooted at the department. The absence of constant positioning among researchers is also thought to

contribute to the positive atmosphere. A common respect for scientific principles is said to unite researchers.

Researchers, senior lecturers, and doctoral students view the seminar culture as a catalyst for increased fairness for students. Quality discussions help prevent discrepancies between advisors' and examiners' assessments. The seminar culture is considered especially valuable when doctoral students present nearly completed manuscripts, where constructive dialogue is key.

Fostering Independent Researchers

A recurring theme among researchers is the department's aim to foster independent researchers. During admissions, doctoral students are encouraged to choose their own projects and research questions, an approach seen as supportive of academic freedom. The staff emphasize transparency in the admissions process and work to prevent any advantages for master's students already at the department when new doctoral positions are filled.

Interviewees also state that doctoral students are free to choose their methodology, though quantitative methods are most common. The doctoral students express a desire to balance qualitative and quantitative methods and have raised this with the department. Doctoral students hired within externally funded projects enjoy a high degree of independence but note that their ability to select research questions is more limited compared to other doctoral students. Both researchers and doctoral students highlight that the freedom to choose their advisors contributes to doctoral students' independence. Senior doctoral students often mentor newcomers, a valued tradition that helps prevent automatic alignment with professors' views and limits their influence.

Doctoral students do not frequently discuss the concept of academic freedom among themselves but focus on seminar culture and maintaining a critical, inquisitive approach to others' research. They typically participate in the doctoral seminar, the general seminar, and other seminars. Doctoral students are encouraged to engage in both academic and public discourse. They find it beneficial to be part of a large doctoral cohort, as this reduces their reliance on a single advisor.

Many people at the department are from other countries, often coming to Sweden for doctoral or postdoctoral positions. According to the interviews, these individuals sometimes need an adjustment period to get used to the relatively high degree of independence at the department. All doctoral students begin their studies by taking a course covering topics such as academic culture and the role and responsibilities of the advisor.

Free Dissemination of Knowledge

There is a tradition at the department of researchers participating in public debates, with several prominent professors taking part. However, there are different perspectives within the department regarding engagement in public debate. Some participate broadly, allowing their research perspective to shape their contributions, while others strictly present their research findings.

Some researchers report that they have been subjected to hate and threats – including death threats – from external sources when presenting their work. None of the interviewed researchers are aware of specific protocols or support structures at the department for dealing with such incidents, but they also do not always seek such support. One way to cope has been to discuss incidents with close colleagues, as there is a strong collegial support network. Researchers explain that they often do not report instances of hate and threats because they feel these incidents affect the individual researcher rather than the department as a whole. However, if students or doctoral students are threatened by external sources, researchers and teachers know that there is a support structure in place.

Some researchers feel that female researchers, particularly those focusing on gender equality, are more often targets of hate and threats than their male counterparts. Others have considered why incidents of hate and threats do not more frequently lead to significant workplace issues, or why they are not more aware of the extent of such incidents among colleagues. One researcher noted that she would feel secure if challenged in exercising their right to freely disseminate knowledge, even if critically reviewed by colleagues, because of the shared understanding among colleagues that all act with good intentions.

Representatives of the administrative staff report that they are aware of a few cases in which senior researchers at the department have been subjected to external hate and threats. In these cases, the researchers informed the leadership and administration, who then took measures such as strengthening security with practical assistance from the university's central security office. The leadership also values the support they have received from the faculty's security team. On one occasion, the administration issued a call to all faculty and researchers to report any instances of hate or threats they had experienced, but no incidents were reported.

In terms of teaching, department study directors believe that students display a high level of tolerance for diverse perspectives. Teachers and researchers also encourage students to hold differing opinions, considering it an important part of education for students to question why specific topics or literature have been chosen. In cases where students have questioned what teachers presented during lessons, teachers have attempted to initiate discussions on topics such as

theoretical perspectives. One teacher emphasized the importance of respectful behavior from students, noting that boundaries have occasionally been tested. Teachers describe a few isolated instances where students have turned to the university's student ombudsman in such situations. Teachers intentionally aim to develop students' critical skills, encouraging a tone of critique that reflects the department's overall discussion climate. Good communication between teachers and students about course evaluation results and similar feedback is seen as a solid foundation for building trust and preventing conflicts between teachers and students.

Free Search for Knowledge

The conditions for free search of knowledge through research at the department are generally regarded as favorable by those interviewed. The department is large, allowing various ideas, research perspectives, and methods to coexist. Researchers feel there is room to support colleagues with research applications, even when they don't share the same research perspectives. The department leadership does not prioritize specific research areas or questions; researchers choose their own. Administrators note a clear administrative framework for researchers' freedom, emphasizing that flexibility within this framework is essential. Recurring activities that support academic freedom include symposia where researchers and external partners can connect, team meetings, and term kick-offs where researchers can present their work before sharing it with the public.

Quantitative methods have historically dominated at the department, sometimes leading to conflicts over methodological preferences. As qualitative projects have gained funding, acceptance for qualitative methods has increased, reducing tensions between the two approaches.

A perceived threat to free search for knowledge is the tendency for researchers to focus on questions they know are likely to receive funding. The boundaries of acceptable research questions are flexible, shaped by both the institution and societal context. Despite the department's success in securing funding, researchers recognize a theoretical limit to free dissemination of knowledge and academic freedom: if you're not successful in obtaining funding, it limits your ability to conduct research. Time spent on grant applications is seen as a potential restriction on academic freedom. The national ethical review processes and challenges in obtaining residence permits for foreign researchers are also noted as obstacles to free search for knowledge.

Development of the Academic Culture

Discussions with faculty, researchers, doctoral students, and department leadership reveal that the academic culture has roots dating back to the 1950s, when formulating socially relevant research questions was a

strong driving force. In the 1960s, the culture continued to evolve, adopting a spirit that aligned with contemporary social debates.

The development of the department was led by an influential professor. The work laid the foundation of a seminar culture where free discussion was central, and collective question formulation was prioritized over disagreements. Researchers believe individuals with diverse political views can collaborate effectively, as political perspectives are allowed in questions but not tied to methods or conclusions. The department has served as a platform for shaping ideas, enabling diverse perspectives and questions. Public engagement, respect for independent research questions, and developing independent researchers early on have been central values. By having many and independent doctoral students at the department, interviewees believe that there will be fewer who automatically follow in their supervisors' footsteps.

The culture remains strong, but leadership stresses the importance of maintaining it over time. Preventing fragmentation – such as dividing the department into sections – is seen as vital to preserving the current academic culture.

Lessons from Case Study 1

In this section, UKÄ highlights general lessons from the case study, without assessing the institution's actions specifically. Case Study 1 illustrates how an academic culture can develop and take shape in daily work among colleagues. The department's seminar activities are cited as essential for maintaining a lively academic dialogue and collegial security – both viewed as crucial for upholding academic freedom.

UKÄ emphasizes the following:

- Working daily to maintain a lively academic dialogue and collegial security is a way to promote and safeguard academic freedom in research. This environment can also empower faculty in their interactions with students, ensuring that academic freedom is realized and stimulated in classrooms.

- Supporting doctoral students and researchers to become independent is crucial for promoting academic freedom. This may include granting doctoral students' autonomy and allowing them to select their advisors. Ensuring open, competitive application processes for doctoral students, career-development position, and research positions, without preferential treatment for current students or researchers, also supports independence.

- Free search and dissemination of knowledge may involve asking controversial questions. Thus, it is essential that a research and teaching environment accommodates researchers and teachers

who use various scientific methods and are inspired by diverse theoretical perspectives, without implicit or explicit expectations for consensus on societal or political issues.

- Access to research funding can support academic freedom by allowing exploration of research questions rather than focusing only on predetermined topics. This access can also legitimize specific research methods.

- A strong collegial environment doesn't protect researchers from hate and threats when sharing research results. It is vital that exposed researchers inform their employers so that the institution can respond when academic freedom is challenged.

- An academic environment must understand which research areas are vulnerable to hate and threats and recognize which researchers and teachers are particularly at risk. This enables both departmental and central university leadership to develop adequate support structures.

Protect Academic Freedom from External Influence – Case Study 2

Case Study 2 provides an example of how an institution can protect academic freedom from external threats and influence. It illustrates how a university can organize itself to address threats to academic freedom. In response to a public event, the university plans an academic seminar. A coordinated campaign, involving emails and social media comments, targets the university, pressuring it to remove one of the panel participants. This case explores questions such as: Who is responsible for safety, workplace environment, and academic freedom during a crisis? What happens afterward to those affected? The focus is on the institution's organization and how it navigates pressures to influence academic discourse.

The study is based on interviews with eight individuals from different roles within the university, including two vice-Presidents, a security officer, a communications and press officer, HR personnel, and panel participants.

Introduction

Individual academic freedom is closely linked to the institution's responsibility for workplace safety – protecting teachers, researchers, and doctoral students from hate and threats. Fear of harassment should not determine which topics are explored and discussed. This case study focuses on the institution's support structure and its response when academic freedom is threatened by external forces. The university highlights the importance of a crisis organization and a clear chain of responsibility when individuals or activities face such threats.

Background

A center at a university was subjected to a coordinated campaign aimed at pressuring the seminar organizer to prevent one of the panel participants from attending the event. The seminar was organized at the initiative of the university's President in response to a political event in the international context. Like other centers at the university, the center in this case study was established by the university's board or President and serves as a collaborative body addressing issues from a societal perspective. The center includes staff from various departments as well as researchers from other institutions. It regularly hosts open seminars on current issues.

As the events in this case unfolded, the center was planning an open seminar and had published an invitation on the university's website. A student association at the university also co-hosted the seminar. The center director, responsible for planning and organizing the seminar, was

listed in the program as the seminar moderator, and the panel included both internal and external researchers associated with the center, as well as a student.

Attempts to Influence Academic Freedom

Shortly after the invitation was posted, the center director began receiving emails in which the senders argued that one of the invited panelists was unsuitable and urged the director to remove this person from the program. The center and the director received numerous emails with similar phrasing, clearly indicating that the criticism was organized. The emails suggested that the center's reputation could be damaged if it allowed the designated researcher to participate in the panel.

Many emails were also sent to the university's President, mirroring those sent to the center. The student association co-organizing the seminar received similar emails. When the center director contacted the President's office regarding the situation, the President responded quickly. It was decided that the seminar would proceed as planned, with the addition that the President would deliver an opening address. A small ad hoc group was formed, including the President, the center director, and their close associates, maintaining close contact in the days leading up to the seminar. Some of the workload resulting from the campaign was managed by the President's staff, who read and responded to emails, monitored social media, and enhanced security protocols. Pre-registration was required for seminar attendance.

The emails continued, now including messages from university faculty, who claimed they had been contacted by students concerned about the participation of the designated researcher. Some suggested an alternative researcher to replace the designated panelist, with similar tone and phrasing. The President responded to these internal colleagues, emphasizing the importance of academic freedom and open dialogue.

The seminar proceeded as planned, with increased security measures and the presence of the President and vice-President. Security personnel and university safety staff were present, along with local police. Only those who pre-registered were allowed entry. The rector opened the event, and the center director, acting as moderator, laid out ground rules for the discussion: the purpose was to deepen and broaden understanding of the topic, and anyone with other intentions was welcome to leave. No one chose to exit, and the seminar proceeded smoothly, ending with a Q&A session. At the close, as the questioned panelist stood up, a few attendees held up protest signs in silent dissent.

After the seminar, the center director and remaining panel members went out to dinner, where the influence campaign was briefly discussed. Overall, they felt the seminar had gone well.

Perspectives from Different Roles

Vice-President Responsible for Academic Freedom

At the university, a vice-President holds responsibility for academic freedom. The vice-President noted that, under normal circumstances, he might not have been aware of the seminar, but due to the pressure campaign, he became part of the small group working to ensure the seminar could proceed without compromising content or security. The vice-President participated in planning discussions, leading to decisions about university leadership presence, heightened security, clear seminar rules, and ensuring panelists felt secure. The vice-President had lunch with the panelists before the seminar, noting that they were motivated rather than concerned, though frustrated by the reactions the university had received.

As the person responsible for academic freedom, the vice-President's role includes assessing what the university can learn from such incidents. This case marked the first time that pressures had been so coordinated. The vice-President acknowledged that it can be unclear who holds responsibility in such situations, as the university lacks a clear activation mechanism. Sometimes, a vice-President will handle a matter to relieve a dean, that is, the person who has line responsibility (line manager) After the crisis phase ends, the vice-President steps back, returning responsibility to the relevant administrative line. The vice-President reflected that even without formal responsibility, it might have been beneficial for someone from university leadership to follow up with the center director after the seminar.

Vice-President for Research

The vice-President for research was not directly involved in this case but learned about it just days before the seminar. He emphasized that academic freedom and openness are central in the university's research strategy. The university's highly decentralized structure delegates responsibility throughout the organization, generally seen as beneficial for decision-making close to the action.

Head of Security

The university has a security department with 24/7 coverage, always ready to respond. The department is responsible for operational aspects of events and liaises with police and security agencies. Security measures are decided case-by-case, with the department lacking investigative authority, which falls under the legal department. Although

the department does not report incidents involving threats and harassment, it encourages victims to do so. The department estimates around ten threatening emails per year.

For the seminar, the security department was contacted by university leadership staff five days prior. Following discussions, security personnel were arranged to be present alongside police. Security recommends pre-registration for events with contentious topics to monitor attendees. The seminar passed without incident, making this a routine case for the security team. The only unusual aspect was the police presence.

If no issues arise, the security department does not usually provide follow-up to event organizers. However, additional support is available upon request.

Communications and Press

The communications director noted growing pressure on universities to respond to current events, a trend that has escalated in recent years. The university often responds by organizing open seminars. In this case, close associates of both the President and the center director worked together to prepare a unified response and monitored social media. They prepared for more intense backlash than occurred, though emotions were high. The vice-President contacted the student association to offer support.

The seminar proceeded with an academic tone, and the focus quickly shifted to the next issue. In an ideal scenario, all involved would have debriefed to discuss lessons learned. However, this was not conducted. The communications director viewed this as an urgent situation rather than a crisis.

HR and Personnel

The HR department was not involved in the seminar events. Normally, a manager would contact HR if an employee faced harassment or threats. There are reporting procedures, though not all incidents are reported centrally. This may stem from a cultural expectation that "researchers should handle criticism and pressure." The university offers health services and crisis support, and employees can raise issues with their union representative.

The HR department focuses on labor law and workplace safety, with little emphasis on academic freedom, concentrating more on respectful interactions.

Panelist

One of the panelists was interviewed (not the one whose participation was questioned). The panelist learned about the protests shortly before the seminar but never considered withdrawing, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a professional stance. The President's presence was appreciated as a show of support. After the seminar, the panel had an informal dinner, but there was no further debriefing.

Center Director

Reflecting on the seminar, the center director remarked that they had never experienced anything like it before. The support from the President and colleagues was essential; without it, the situation would have been extremely challenging. Leadership played a critical role, providing central support and a clear distribution of responsibilities.

Lessons from Case Study 2

In this section, the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) highlights general lessons drawn from the case study; these should not be interpreted as an evaluation of the university's actions in this specific case.

Case Study 2 is an example of a coordinated attempt to limit academic freedom. The protests against the composition of the panel were intended to influence who should have the right to speak on a specific issue. The attempts to limit academic freedom mainly originated externally, but university researchers and teachers also participated in the coordinated efforts. This raises challenging issues regarding the balance between employees' freedom of expression, the university's responsibility to protect academic freedom, and its duty to maintain a safe working environment. A university must protect academic freedom without simultaneously limiting its employees' freedom of speech. At the same time, the university has a responsibility to ensure a safe working environment.

Freedom of expression and academic freedom are both essential for fostering an open climate where diverse ideas and perspectives, including controversial ones, can be discussed. It is important that no one is silenced in the name of academic freedom, and that an open climate for dialogue exists within academia to enable debate and discussion. However, UKÄ notes that social media has created new possibilities for harassment campaigns and the spread of hate, threats, and defamation related to research and knowledge dissemination, posing new challenges for universities compared to traditional academic debate. According to the legislative preparatory work for Chapter 1, Section 6 of the Higher Education Act, it is crucial that fear of threats and harassment does not influence which topics are pursued for research and dissemination. This underscores the universities' responsibility for occupational health and

safety and for countering hate, threats, violence, and harassment within the sector.

UKÄ particularly emphasizes:

- University leadership can and should serve as a model for conducting academic dialogue and expressing academic criticism.

- It is important that the university's support is coordinated and adequate, ensuring that individual employees are not left to navigate situations challenging academic freedom alone. Additionally, the university's support structure should be well-known among employees, so they know where to turn if academic freedom is threatened or at risk.

- A clear crisis management plan, where those involved have the necessary knowledge and skills and are aware of their responsibilities, facilitates coordination when academic freedom is challenged or threatened.

- A crisis or threatening situation requires quick and clear action, which may involve transferring responsibility from the immediate supervisor to another part of the university, such as the security department. If the line management is bypassed, the information chain should remain intact to prevent responsible managers from being excluded from the information flow. Otherwise, there is a risk that responsible managers lack sufficient knowledge and insight to conduct a debriefing and/or proper follow-up with those affected.

- Informing and involving the university's support structure, including safety representatives or occupational health services, during and after a threatening situation can be important for follow-up. Otherwise, there is a risk that a researcher who does not receive support, help, and feedback in a threatening situation or during follow-up may become more cautious in the future, potentially leading to a restriction of academic freedom.

Protecting Academic Freedom in Teaching – Case Study 3

The third case study illustrates what can happen to a teacher's work environment following an incident in the classroom. During a seminar, students protested a teacher's choice of words, later claiming the teacher acted unprofessionally and should be dismissed. Although initially supported by the director of undergraduate studies, the teacher was ultimately left to handle the situation alone, both in relation to the students and colleagues. Who is responsible for ensuring the teacher's work environment in the classroom is acknowledged and monitored by the department? And what happens to the teacher's academic freedom when support is lacking?
The case description is based on four interviews with five individuals, including the teacher, director of undergraduate studies, head of department, and student representatives.

Introduction

Individual academic freedom encompasses both research and teaching. In the context of teaching, the Higher Education Act mandates that teaching and learning environments should foster an open climate where different ideas and perspectives can be discussed, with both teachers and students mutually responsible for promoting and protecting such a culture. This case study focuses on what can happen to a teacher when academic freedom is challenged in a teaching situation and how a department can work to safeguard academic freedom in teaching.

The case takes place at the end of a course, during a question-and-answer session. The student group is diverse, with students enrolled in programs at the home department as well as other departments.

In the Classroom

During the seminar, a teacher uses the n-word in response to a student's question, explaining it as an example of a value-laden term. According to the teacher, a group of students reacted strongly to the use of the word, asserting that the teacher, being white, had no right to use it. The students stood up in protest during the session and approached the teacher afterward to express their disapproval. Other students opposed the critical group's actions, resulting in a polarized student group, which continued into subsequent sessions of the course. The critical student group belonged to a department different from that offering the course.

After the Incident

Later that day, the teacher posted a message on the course platform, providing an explanation and apologizing for the incident. The teacher did not blame the critical student group.

The director of undergraduate studies, responsible for the course, was informed about the incident by the teacher and wanted to support the teacher, recognizing their vulnerable position. The director of undergraduate studies posted a message on the course platform, addressing the students and stating that the teacher had not intended to cause harm.

The critical student group responded with continued criticism, including a demand for the teacher's dismissal, arguing the teacher had acted unprofessionally. Neither the head of department nor the department where the critical students were based was contacted about the incident. The incident was not discussed in any departmental forums, and the department had no established procedures for addressing such situations.

The teacher experienced prolonged distress following the incident and felt anxious about colleagues' potential judgments, fearing that without full context, some might perceive the teacher as a racist who uses the n-word casually. The teacher noted that academia has traditionally included eccentric individuals who may not recognize social boundaries and worried that colleagues might think of him in this way.

In the absence of a departmental forum to address the incident, the teacher felt compelled to repeatedly explain the situation to different colleagues over multiple semesters. While comfortable discussing the incident with a select few colleagues, this was often done outside the workplace. The teacher expressed a desire for a forum where teachers and colleagues could discuss such issues, which could also have a preventive effect by clarifying appropriate boundaries.

Following the incident, the teacher, against his wishes, became more cautious in his teaching, eventually removing the Q&A session from the course. Although the teacher values discussions of complex, norm-related issues in academia, they lack common forums for discussions between students and teachers on such topics.

The teacher did not request specific support from department leadership regarding the incident, as he did not want to escalate the situation. Nor did he contact occupational health services, finding that step too significant.

Preventive Measures Today – Head of Department

The current head of department was not in the role at the time of the incident but describes how matters are currently handled. Academic

freedom in teaching is raised at the department, and efforts are made to work on this theme, although keeping such discussions active is challenging. Work is also ongoing regarding which forums should host these discussions. According to the head of department – similar to the director of undergraduate studies – the issue has gained importance following media attention on a similar case at another institution. This case has led to increased concern among teachers at the department, with many viewings it not as an isolated student protest but as part of a broader societal trend where facts are questioned, and misinformation spreads via social media, making it harder for teachers to do their jobs. Several teachers see this as a democratic issue as more people in society challenge factual information.

The head of department highlights the problem of the "lone academic" image. As a leader, she wants to signal that the department should tackle such incidents collectively and stress the importance of strong collegiality. It is essential to have clear protocols when incidents occur and for teachers to feel that the leadership understands and supports them. Responsibility should reside at the leadership level but also be clear at all levels so that course directors and faculty teams know how to proceed if a teacher's academic freedom feels threatened. This applies both to the immediate situation and follow-up for the affected teacher.

The head of department emphasizes that students need to understand their responsibilities and expectations, enabling action when they do not adhere to rules. It is also crucial for teachers to know the routines and available measures. The head of department also suggested that central administration could engage in more dialogue on these issues and facilitate greater exchange between departments.

Preventive Measures Today – Student Ombudsmen

The current student ombudsmen were not in place at the time of the incident but describe their current procedures. They would primarily learn about a similar case if a student raised the issue directly with them or through departmental student councils. To gain context, students are often asked to provide supporting documents, such as email exchanges or course syllabi. The ombudsmen mainly assist students in advocating for themselves and guide them to the appropriate university body. In some cases, they contact the director of undergraduate studies, head of department, or academic advisor, but they never interact with the teacher in question. They are also not involved in cases where teachers feel threatened by students.

Cases of students reporting inappropriate language used by teachers occur a few times per term. The ombudsmen believe that greater pedagogical training for teachers – such as inclusive language and how to present diverse perspectives effectively – could help prevent similar situations. They also highlight the lack of dialogue between teachers and

students about seminar culture and the rules for engagement, suggesting that establishing guidelines could be beneficial. However, they acknowledge the risk that such guidelines could feel overly restrictive to individual teachers and classes.

Lessons from Case Study 3

In this section, UKÄ highlights general lessons from the current case study, which should not be seen as an assessment of the institution's actions in this specific case.

Case Study 3 illustrates how an incident led to limitations on a teacher's academic freedom in the classroom, impacting the teacher's work environment within the department. The teacher removed the Q&A session from the course and felt the need to explain the situation to colleagues. According to legislative commentary on Chapter 1, Section 6 of the Higher Education Act, academic freedom covers both research and education. For education, it means that teaching and other learning situations should foster an open climate where diverse, even controversial, ideas and perspectives can be explored (prop. 2020/21:60, s. 131).

UKÄ emphasizes:

- A classroom conflict can affect both the teacher's work environment and the quality of teaching. A teacher who becomes more cautious in teaching hinders an open climate for discussing diverse ideas and perspectives, which could include unexpected or controversial insights.

- There is a risk that incidents challenging a teacher's academic freedom or work environment are not followed up within the organizational hierarchy. While the primary responsibility lies with leadership, it should also be clearly delegated throughout the organization to ensure the affected teacher receives support.

- Departments should have clear procedures for situations where academic freedom is challenged or a teacher's work environment is threatened, ensuring that those affected receive necessary support. A crisis management framework that applies to everyone, even if not initially requested, is crucial. Even if the teacher or management initially deem the incident minor, it is important to reference available support if needed later.

- Encouraging discussions on academic freedom in both teaching and research among faculty could promote knowledge-sharing on handling challenging situations with students, thus strengthening academic freedom.

- Ongoing dialogue with students about what constitutes an academic culture and how classroom discourse relates to academic freedom and teachers' work environment could help reduce similar incidents.

- Students have the right to express criticism, but that does not mean it is always justified. Universities are responsible for protecting teachers' work environments if they are subjected to student hostility.

Promoting and Protecting Free Knowledge Dissemination – Case Study 4

Case Study 4 provides an example of a university's efforts to safeguard free knowledge dissemination in relation to external collaborative partners and external research funders. This study highlights specific areas where free knowledge dissemination may be challenged, such as contractual agreements in collaborative projects and with international funders, and the individual researcher's responsibility to foresee the potential dual use of published knowledge, including military applications. This case draws on the experiences of researchers and a legal advisor to illustrate how academic freedom may be at risk and examines how the university defends free knowledge dissemination during contract negotiations. It also addresses the responsibilities of individual researchers in regard to dual-use research and awareness of the security context.

The case description is based on six interviews with seven individuals, including two researchers, a vice-President, a university lawyer, a development manager from the Sweden's innovation agency (Vinnova), and heads of division and department from the Swedish Energy Agency.

Introduction

Universities are mandated by law to promote academic freedom and protect a culture that supports free knowledge dissemination. The Higher Education Act outlines that universities' primary tasks are to conduct education and research, which include collaborating with the broader society for mutual benefit and ensuring that university knowledge and skills benefit the public (Chapter 1, Section 2, HL). In research, this collaboration often involves projects conducted with private companies, generating various intellectual property rights, such as patents and copyrighted works. Agreements between universities, researchers, and companies may impose restrictions on how research results are used and disseminated.

This case study explores how academic freedom may be challenged in relation to knowledge dissemination through collaborations with external parties and funders. It examines legal issues related to intellectual property rights of academic staff (e.g., the "teacher's exemption"), agreements with collaborative partners and international funders, and, lastly, addresses the dissemination of externally funded research that could have both civilian and military applications. These specific cases illustrate broader principles related to academic freedom and its limitations.

Academic Freedom and the Laws and Principles Governing the Teacher's Exemption

The case study addresses teachers' rights to their intellectual creations, specifically under the "teacher's exemption." In Sweden, a law dating back to 1949 safeguards university teachers from losing their intellectual property rights. According to the Act (1949:345) on the Right in Employee Inventions (LAU) an employer may, under certain conditions, claim rights to inventions created by an employee. However, there is an exception for "teachers at universities and university colleges, or other educational institutions" who are not considered employees under this law (Section 1, Subsection 2, LAU). At the university in this case study, the general rule is that other intellectual property created as part of research-related tasks also belongs to the creator. When an author is employed by the university, the rights remain with the employee unless otherwise agreed. This practice reflects the university's broad interpretation of the teacher's exemption, extending it beyond merely patentable inventions.

However, the university applies the principle that if a copyright-protected work results from an employee's duties or specific tasks or instructions, the university retains the right to use the work within its normal operations, for foreseeable purposes at the time the work was created. This ensures that newly generated knowledge remains available for institutional purposes, supporting teaching and research within the university's mission.

For collaborative research projects, the university has established principles to protect researchers' rights to publish their findings within a reasonable time after their creation and to continue researching their own results. The university's legal department helps in drafting agreements for collaborative projects or commissioned research.

Teacher's Exemption in Collaborations

The researchers interviewed had differing views on the teacher's exemption, which grants researchers broad rights to their results. One researcher believes that collaborations between universities, industry, and public funding bodies, such as Vinnova and the Swedish Energy Agency, undermine academic freedom. In agreements, researchers' rights – particularly intellectual property rights – can be eroded under pressure from collaborating companies. The researcher compares Sweden with other European countries, where intellectual property rights typically belong to the university, meaning companies negotiate with the university rather than individual researchers.

Another researcher at the university, however, sees the teacher's exemption as an obstacle to research, explaining that companies would prefer to negotiate with the university, as they do in other countries.

Negotiating with an individual researcher presents greater risks, as researchers might resist over intellectual property rights. Since researchers own their rights, the university cannot enter into agreements on their behalf. This researcher argues that many agreements fall through, which is detrimental to researchers, industry, and society.

Both Vinnova and the Swedish Energy Agency, which support research and innovation, recognize the challenges in agreements between researchers and industry. These agencies require industry partners as co-applicants for certain research funding, which is why they were chosen for this case study to illustrate how academic freedom can be challenged in contractual negotiations with industrial partners.

They explain that they require all necessary agreements between involved parties before they commit funding. Representatives from the Swedish Energy Agency note that they mandate intellectual property agreements in collaborative projects but do not review the contracts. "If we required the agreements, we would also obtain sensitive information, which is commercially sensitive." Ensuring agreements between researchers and partners is crucial, as project profits must at least partially benefit the university and researchers to avoid research funding becoming indirect state aid.[19]

Teacher's Exemption Within the University

In relation to academic freedom, the university's legal advisor provides additional insight. The teacher's exemption may lead to misconduct or idea theft in a research environment, as patents can generate significant revenue. Project leaders might delay publication for commercial gain, potentially harming doctoral students who rely on timely publication to complete their studies. A doctoral student's time is limited, while project researchers can afford to wait for product refinement. Conflicts arising from such situations may not always be seen as issues of academic freedom but are instead framed as personal conflicts or work environment issues.

The vice-President stresses the importance of information, especially for doctoral students. Project leaders are required to inform everyone involved when companies are participating and there are patenting possibilities. It is emphasized that the responsibility for this lies with project leaders to ensure everyone understands the terms.

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[19] State aid is when the state, municipality or county council supports a certain activity with public funds. The EU's rules for state aid are governed by Article 107.1 TFEU. With certain exceptions, the public sector may not provide support until it has been approved in advance by the European Commission. The purpose of the rules is to ensure that competition in the EU's internal market is not distorted.

Academic Freedom: National Collaborations and Co-Funding within Sweden

The university collaborates with various companies and organizations of different sizes and from diverse sectors. This includes partnerships ranging from collaborations involving single researchers to larger co-funded projects and partnerships. About 50 percent of the university's research is funded through external grants, obtained via open calls from research councils and other funding sources, including collaborative and innovation projects.

The university's legal advisor explains that certain industrial sectors are accustomed to treating universities similarly to subcontractors when drafting agreements. Conflicts related to contractual negotiations have been frequent with representatives from Swedish industry over the past decade. The university's legal department ensures agreements comply with Swedish law and safeguard principles of academic freedom. Challenges in negotiations often do not concern the choice of research questions or methods or the right to continue researching material after a project but rather focus on the right to free knowledge dissemination. The advisor deems it reasonable that companies should have a chance to review articles before publication to protect trade secrets introduced into projects and retain the right to delay publication of research results, sometimes necessary for patenting. However, the advisor does not accept contractual language that would prevent publication of research results generated by university researchers if the results could be seen as sensitive or damaging to the company. The advisor cites an example from another university where researchers collaborated on developing a medical device that proved to be of poor quality. When the company attempted to block publication, the researchers refused.

According to the university's legal advisor, Vinnova and the Swedish Energy Agency allow companies substantial freedom to shape collaborative conditions within their research programs. Universities attempt to maintain a unified stance, though it is challenging with significant funding at stake.

The legal advisor stresses that the academic community fully supports the principle of academic freedom. However, strong incentives drive researchers and research leaders to secure funding, creating potential conflicts between principle and practice. When a partner or funder offers significant funding, it may be difficult for individual researchers to resist relinquishing the right to free publication. In fact, some researchers have argued that it is their academic freedom to waive their academic freedom by agreeing to these terms with industry partners.

Representatives from Vinnova and the Swedish Energy Agency have engaged in discussions with corporate and university legal departments on drafting contracts. Vinnova understands that issues concerning free knowledge dissemination are critical, though they state that their role

does not involve addressing academic freedom matters. The Swedish Energy Agency attempted to create a contract template in collaboration with major universities, aiming for broad acceptance. However, parties approached this work from different perspectives, protecting their own interests. One challenge, according to the Swedish Energy Agency, is that companies often bring sensitive information to projects, which they wish to protect from dissemination through researchers' publications. The agency's representatives concur that it can be challenging for individual researchers to negotiate contract terms.

Academic Freedom and International Agreements

The university participates in numerous international research infrastructures, with the EU being one of the main funders of its research. The university's legal advisor notes legal challenges within international projects, particularly in European research projects that involve multiple universities and companies across the EU and beyond. A standardized agreement, the DESCA model, is commonly used for EU projects. These agreements often allow companies the right to review articles before publication to ensure their interests are not compromised. The university's legal advisors would not accept such terms in national projects. Additionally, although these requirements are present in the contracts, researchers may not always adhere strictly to them, though informal contacts occur before publication. These situations rarely lead to conflict and have not resulted in litigation for the university.

The university's legal advisor provides examples of challenges when negotiating with partners from different countries. For instance, a larger democratic country may provide a comprehensive extensive document of legal requirements that must be accepted as a condition of collaboration. These terms are non-negotiable. Conversely, in a previous collaboration with a larger non-democratic country, no demands or influence attempts occurred, resulting in favorable terms for the Swedish researchers. The legal advisor points out, however, that the outcomes of unfulfilled agreements are unpredictable in relation to the non-democratic country.

Both Vinnova and the Swedish Energy Agency fund projects involving foreign actors. Vinnova does not conduct checks or enforce regulations regarding collaborations with foreign companies. They have asked the government about possible regulation but have not received guidance. Both agencies indicate that they cannot impose requirements without explicit legal support. The Swedish Energy Agency states that its mission is to generate benefits within Sweden and promote Swedish employment. Applications not fulfilling this purpose receive lower scores in their evaluations. It is rare for the Swedish Energy Agency to fund projects involving what they refer to as problematic countries or companies from such nations.

The vice-President explains that the university's delegation structure was recently updated so that the vice-President is responsible for signing agreements with entities from countries engaged in security-threatening activities, as according to the Swedish security service, SÄPO. The challenge lies in making correct decisions and ensuring researchers are informed and raise relevant concerns with their department heads, who then escalate them accordingly.

The vice-President emphasizes that collaborations often involve companies based in Sweden but with foreign ownership. There is no policy to review the ownership of these companies; assessments are made on a case-by-case basis.

Externally Funded Projects and Dual-Use Applications

The interviews reveal security concerns around knowledge dissemination and externally funded projects leading to technology for civilian use that could also be used militarily, known as "dual-use." For instance, cumulative knowledge from various projects could allow foreign powers to identify vulnerabilities in society. Potential security risks may affect researchers' ability to publish results and hinder academic freedom if researchers are unsure of the regulations and may, therefore, avoid specific topics.

One researcher explains that many researchers may not foresee how their knowledge might be used outside civilian applications. They are often solely focused on solving problems, which places too much responsibility on individual researchers to understand dual-use issues. Another researcher states that awareness of security risks associated with sharing knowledge and technological secrets, especially in areas like energy, is generally low among academics. Swedish export controls on military goods apply here, but the researcher notes that few academics are aware of this. Research that may be used militarily can also provide more funds from companies, which in turn means more funding from Vinnova or the Swedish Energy Agency. According to the researcher, money, rather than ethics and security, tends to guide decisions.

Vinnova acknowledges that dual-use has become increasingly relevant, driven not only by military but also by civilian research, such as in drones and AI. Vinnova is currently examining whether regulations should govern collaborations with specific countries. However, no such regulations exist presently.

The Swedish Energy Agency shares Vinnova's view that research from various areas can be used for military purposes, with boundaries often being unclear. Dual-use has become relevant for the agency in identifying societal vulnerabilities. Various research projects contribute pieces of knowledge, and together these can reveal significant insights.

However, the agency has no rules or controls related to this issue in evaluating research applications.

The vice-President emphasizes that raising awareness is essential but also calls for clearer boundaries. Much basic research has dual-use potential, and expecting researchers to avoid publishing results is unrealistic. The vice-President suggests focusing on identifying genuinely sensitive information, which would allow for transparency in other areas.

Lessons from Case Study 4

This section highlights UKÄ's general insights from the case study, which should not be taken as an assessment of the university's actions in this specific instance.

Under Higher Education Act, the primary duties of universities are to conduct teaching and research. These activities include collaborating with society and stakeholders for mutual benefit, ensuring that the knowledge generated within universities benefits society (Chapter 1, Sections 2 and 6 of the Higher Education Act). In this regard, university legal advisors play a crucial role in protecting academic freedom in contractual negotiations. Case Study 4 illustrates the strong incentives for researchers to secure funding and collaborate, and the conflict that can arise between these incentives and academic freedom principles. When partners or funders offer substantial sums, it may be challenging for individual researchers to resist relinquishing the right to publish freely.

In the preparatory statements for the Higher Education Act, it is emphasized that academic freedom must always operate within the legal framework and according to applicable values (ibid., p. 131). Case Study 4 highlights regulations involving Swedish contract law, EU law, the teacher's exemption, universities' responsibilities under the Work Environment Act, and Swedish export controls on military goods. The study demonstrates the complex balancing act between academic freedom and other regulations or priorities that can affect knowledge dissemination.

UKÄ particularly emphasizes:

- In industry collaborations, there is a risk that researchers' academic freedom – in this case, the right to freely disseminate knowledge – could be restricted through contractual agreements.

- Conflicts may arise when research results offer financial benefits, such as through patents. This can threaten academic freedom, especially for doctoral students and postdocs, who may have more difficulty asserting their rights. An incident labeled as

a personal conflict might actually involve an academic freedom challenge.

- EU projects have established a standard, the DESCA model, regularly applied in contracts, which often allows companies to review articles before publication to ensure that their interests are protected.

- Security risks are associated with sharing knowledge and technological secrets in areas like energy with foreign countries. Here, Swedish export controls on military goods come into play concerning dual-use. Placing responsibility on individual researchers to navigate these issues is burdensome and could hinder academic freedom if researchers avoid specific topics out of uncertainty.

- Clearly defining the scope of academic freedom when other regulations or priorities come into play is crucial. The university and its legal advisors bear significant responsibility to support researchers in these areas.

- Public research funders, which act as intermediaries between universities and industry, do not have an explicit mandate to protect academic freedom, which limits their ability to consider this issue when awarding research funding.

International Perspective

The international perspective included in the government commission comprises two parts. The first is an account of academic freedom in Sweden based on the Academic Freedom Index compiled by Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) at the University of Gothenburg. This account provides an overview of global assessments of academic freedom, the historical development of academic freedom in Sweden, and Sweden's standing compared to other countries in Europe and the United States.

The second part is a literature review on challenges and solutions related to academic freedom in countries with education systems that parallel the Swedish system. This review was prepared by the consultancy firm Sweco on behalf of UKÄ and is presented in full in Appendix 2. The approach is descriptive, summarizing findings from studies, reports, and inquiries, while also describing, to some extent, the legal frameworks of the included countries. In line with the government commission, the focus is on issues related to the relationship between institutions and individuals.

The compilation provides a general overview of academic freedom in the United States and Europe, followed by a more detailed exploration of countries with education systems similar to Sweden's, including Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Academic Freedom Index

The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) measures academic freedom across 179 countries and territories using assessments by country experts. AFI scores range from 0 to 1, where values closer to 1 indicate greater academic freedom. The index combines expert assessments across five domains:

- Freedom to research and teach – the extent to which researchers are free to develop and pursue their own research and teaching without interference.

- Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination – the degree to which researchers are free to exchange and communicate their research ideas and results.

- Institutional autonomy – the extent to which universities exercise institutional autonomy in practice.

- Campus integrity – the extent to which campuses are free from politically motivated surveillance or security intrusions.

- Freedom of academic and cultural expression – the degree of academic freedom and cultural expression related to political issues.

Experts assign a score from 0 to 4 for each area, with values closer to 4 indicating a stronger position in that area.

Global Academic Freedom According to the Index

According to the AFI, 33 countries experienced shifts in academic freedom in 2023. In 23 countries, academic freedom decreased, while in 10, it increased. Compared to 50 years ago, academic freedom has improved in 56 countries. Around 3.6 billion people now live in countries with highly restricted academic freedom, defined as countries with an AFI score of 0.2 or below. The percentage of the global population living in such countries is similar to that of 50 years ago, though the number of individuals affected is far higher due to population growth. Academic freedom peaked in 2006, with subsequent declines partly due to higher population growth in countries with lower academic freedom.[20]

Academic Freedom Index (2023)
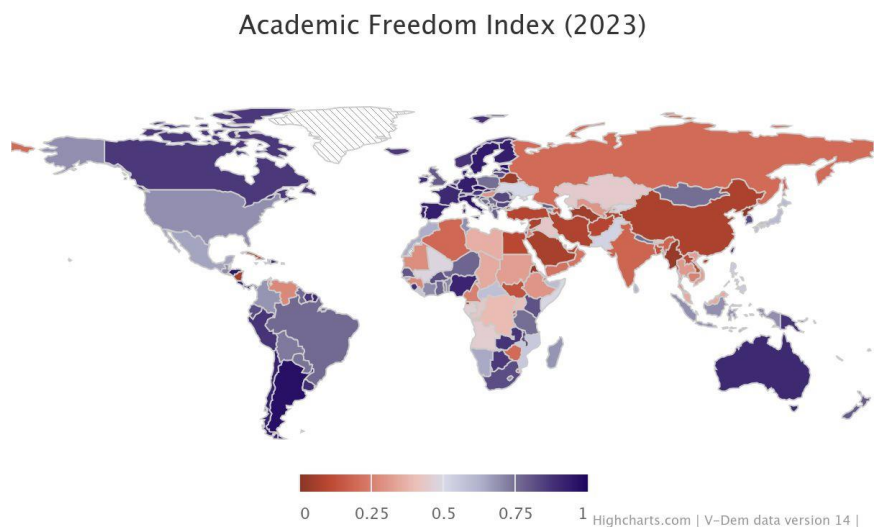
Figure 33. Academic Freedom Index in 179 countries worldwide in 2023. The index ranges from 0 to 1. Red color indicates a low value on the index, while blue color indicates a high value.

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[20] Academic Freedom Index Update 2024

Sweden

Sweden's AFI score for 2023 is 0.94. The table below shows the values for each of the indicators that comprise the index.

Table 4. The value for each indicator that together make up the Academic Freedom Index, for Sweden in 2023. Each indicator can take a value between 0 and 4.

Indicator	Sweden's Value 2023
Freedom to research and teach	3.51
Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination	3.92
Institutional autonomy	2.54
Campus integrity	3.85
Academic and cultural expression	3.76

Of the five indicators, Sweden has the lowest score for institutional autonomy – an area outside the scope of this assignment. However, Sweden scores relatively high on the other indicators, which primarily concern the relationship between the institution and the teacher/researcher. Both Sweden's overall AFI score and the scores for individual indicators have remained stable over a longer period. That said, a slight decline in the AFI score (Figure 34) and in a couple of the indicators (Figure 35) can be observed in recent years. However, these changes are not statistically significant.
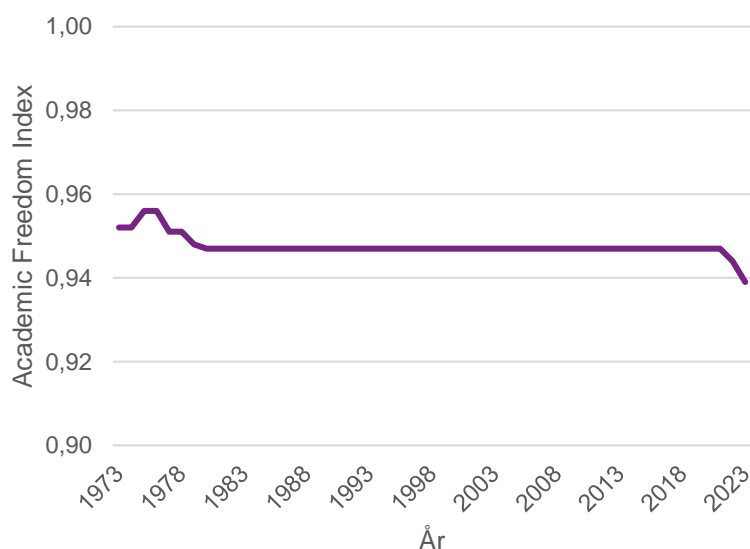
Figure 34. Academic Freedom Index for Sweden from 1973 to 2023. The index ranges from 0 to 1. Note the broken y-axis, where only values between 0.9 and 1.0 are shown.

AFI

4,5

4,0

3,5

3,0

2,5

2,0

1973 1978 1983 1988 1993 1998 2003 2008 2013 2018 2023
                                                          Year

——— Campus integrity

——— Freedom of academic and cultural expression

——— Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination

——— Freedom to research and teach

——— Institutional autonomy
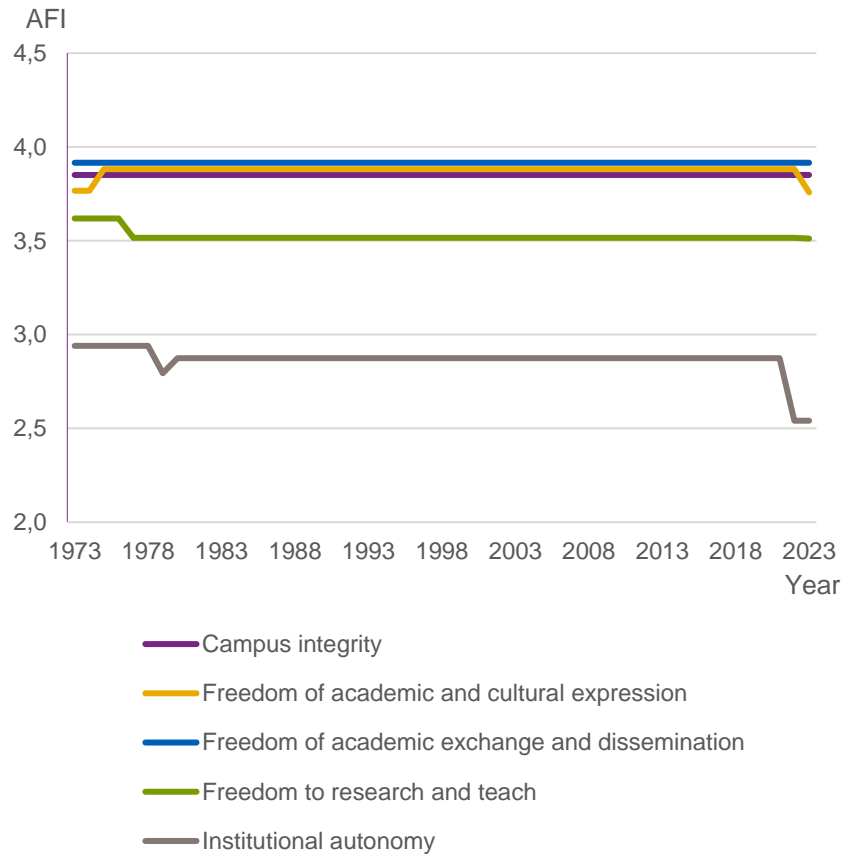
Figure 35. The five indicators that together make up the Academic Freedom Index for Sweden from 1973 to 2023. The values of the indicators range from 0 to 4. Note the broken y-axis, where only values between 2.0 and 4.0 are shown.

Comparison with Other Countries

The table below presents AFI scores for Sweden, a selection of other countries, and Europe in 2013 and 2023.

*Table 5. Academic Freedom Index for Sweden and a selection of other countries in 2013 and 2023. The index ranges from 0 to 1. *A statistically significant change between the years 2013 and 2023.*

Country/Region	2013	2023
Sweden	0.95	0.94
Finland	0.94	0.93
Denmark	0.96	0.89
Norway	0.91	0.87
Iceland	0.93	0.86
Germany	0.97	0.93
The Netherlands	0.92	0.79*
USA	0.92	0.69*
Europe	0.86	0.81

Table 6 presents the values for the indicators for Sweden, a selection of other countries, and the total for Europe in 2013 and 2023.

*Table 6. The five indicators that together make up the Academic Freedom Index for Sweden, a selection of other countries, and Europe, in 2013 and 2023. The values of the indicators range from 0 to 4. *A statistically significant change between the years 2013 and 2023.*

	Freedom to research and teach		Freedom of academic exchange and dissemination		Institutional autonomy		Campus integrity		Freedom of academic and cultural expression	
	2013	*2023*	*2013*	*2023*	*2013*	*2023*	*2013*	*2023*	*2013*	*2023*
Sweden	3.52	3.51	3.92	3.92	2.88	2.54	3.85	3.85	3.88	3.76
Finland	3.51	3.50	3.82	3.67	2.75	2.94	3.89	3.89	3.85	3.81
Denmark	3.59	3.59	3.92	3.56*	2.81	2.85	3.90	3.35*	3.93	3.73
Norway	3.49	N/A	3.69	3.35	2.61	2.46	3.70	3.70	3.90	3.54
Iceland	3.73	3.00*	3.79	3.79	2.40	2.25	3.84	3.84	3.50	3.08
Germany	3.88	3.62	3.91	3.91	3.25	3.01	3.82	3.46	3.61	3.48
The Netherlands	3.23	2.73*	3.63	3.35	3.41	3.14	3.94	3.11*	3.59	3.31
USA	3.66	2.60*	3.56	2.94*	3.36	2.58*	3.26	2.62*	3.88	3.62
Europe	1.94	1.47	2.00	1.63	1.44	1.06	2.25	1.86	2.15	1.61

Among individual countries, Denmark, Iceland, the Netherlands, and the USA show statistically significant declines in one or more indicators over the last ten years. No statistically significant increases were observed. In the annual AFI report, countries are ranked based on their AFI scores. Most of the selected countries have AFI values that are not significantly different from each other.[21] Germany, Finland, and Sweden rank in the top 10% of countries assessed by the AFI, with Sweden having the highest position among the three. Denmark ranks in the top 20%, while Norway and Iceland are in the top 30%. The Netherlands and the USA, which rank in the top 40% and 50% respectively, have experienced significant declines in academic freedom over the past decade.

A report from the European Parliament[22] states that Sweden has among the highest levels of practical academic freedom within the EU, while its legal protection for academic freedom is among the weakest. The report examines institutional autonomy across EU countries, where Sweden ranks highly for personnel matters, at a medium level for organization and academic autonomy, and in the lower half for financial autonomy. For institutional autonomy, Sweden ranks among the lowest in the EU.

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[21] Academic Freedom Index Update 2024
[22] Europaparlamentet. 2023. State of Play of Academic Freedom in the EU Member States: Overview of de Facto Trends and Developments. Bryssel: European Parliamentary Research Service.

Summary of the Literature Review

Challenges in the USA and EU

The American literature highlights political influence, increasing commercialization of universities, and a lack of job security as significant challenges to academic freedom. Additionally, a culture of conformity is noted, where researchers face sanctions from universities and, to some extent, the broader society for expressing differing viewpoints. Terms like "cancel culture" and "de-platforming" originate from the American discourse.

In EU member states, politics also influences research, potentially weakening academic freedom protections. There are indications that university administrations are increasingly limiting researchers' ability to exercise academic freedom. Other challenges include job insecurity, risks associated with high levels of external funding, and questioning of science's role in society.

Different Legal Frameworks in Denmark, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany

The legal foundations for protecting academic freedom vary across the countries studied. While academic freedom is specifically protected in the Finnish and German constitutions, it is regulated in university laws in Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands. The Finnish university law also protects the freedom of research and teaching as a complement to constitutional protection. In Norway, academic freedom is not explicitly mentioned in the constitution, but is indirectly supported by the constitutional protection of freedom of expression. In Germany, each state has its own higher education legislation.

Challenges in the Studied Countries

Universities as State-Governed Organizations

Literature suggests that university priorities are increasingly influenced by politics in many countries. For example, in Denmark, priorities are largely determined by professional boards, including representatives from business and industry, rather than the academic community. In Norway and Germany, political parties have, at times, attempted to delegitimize academia or restrict the use of state research funds. Although Finland's University Act protects institutional autonomy, government influence through intermediary organizations that provide substantial research funding negatively affects real autonomy.

Loyalty to Employers

Studies from Denmark and Norway indicate that researchers sometimes avoid criticizing their institutions or tackling controversial topics for fear of repercussions or feeling bound by loyalty to their employers. However, a Norwegian government report on academic freedom of expression found no legal barriers preventing researchers from discussing results when not primarily representing their institutions, even if these results don't align with institutional priorities. Nevertheless, conflicts often arise when institutions argue that individual researchers' statements conflict with the institution's values.

Job Insecurity

Precarious employment conditions are highlighted as a threat to academic freedom across all the studied countries. Increasingly, researchers' positions are funded by external sources, making it crucial for institutions to secure competitive external funding. Consequently, researchers must spend more time on funding applications and may feel pressure to conform in their research and professional statements. Finland has tried to address this with a tenure-track system, though some researchers view it as fostering elitism, favoring specific researchers, and privileging discipline-based research. Germany has introduced a law limiting temporary research positions to a maximum of twelve years, which may inadvertently exclude mid-level researchers.

Lack of Collegiality

Publications emphasize the importance of a collegial scientific debate where researchers can question, test, and critique each other's hypotheses and findings – an essential principle for academic freedom. Nonetheless, literature describes various restrictions on collegial debate and criticism, including hierarchical role distributions, field-specific competition, and issues when externally funded research is questioned by others. Such factors can impair collegiality, leading to negative impacts on academic freedom, including pressure from colleagues, funders, and institutions, as well as self-censorship and conflicts within and between researchers and institutions.

Both Finnish and Norwegian literature discuss how New Public Management (NPM)-inspired or hybrid governance models in academia have led to increased research and teaching oversight, additional administration, and higher demands for productivity. Governance is often top-down, where managers monitor researchers' work based on pre-set goals and indicators rather than peer evaluations. The academic system in the Netherlands is also under significant pressure, with a chronic lack of resources and permanent positions, heavy workloads, and hierarchical relationships between junior and senior researchers. This hierarchy contributes to a lack of social security, which can discourage researchers from raising critical issues, while university leadership lacks

constructive management strategies. Studies from Norway and Germany also indicate that informal mechanisms within academia promote subject-specific homogeneity.

Attempts to Silence Academic Discourse

Terms like "political correctness," "cancel culture," "woke," and "de-platforming" are largely rooted in U.S. discourse and are often seen as politically charged. Assessing the extent to which researchers are prevented from presenting their findings, discussing specific topics, inviting certain speakers, or including specific texts – or engage in self-censorship – remains challenging. These topics appear in literature covering all studied countries except Finland and are perceived as threats to academic freedom. Literature also provides individual cases where researchers felt their academic freedom was limited due to criticism that did not aim to seek truth. Researchers in social sciences and humanities appear particularly affected.

Harassment, Threats, and Media Pressure

Studies also show that harassment, threats, defamation, and media pressure related to research, or fear of these, can restrict academic freedom. Survey studies from Finland and Norway indicate that harassment and threats are serious issues on university campuses, with social scientists reporting the highest rates of harassment. Finnish research shows that online harassment from colleagues is perceived as more challenging than external harassment. It also finds that researchers rarely report incidents to university management or the police. Finnish and Norwegian studies show that some researchers avoid presenting findings publicly or researching specific topics out of fear of harassment, threats, and public criticism. Studies from Norway, the Netherlands, and Germany highlight limitations experienced by researchers publicly discussing COVID-19 and the pandemic. These include manipulated results or sensationalized media coverage, as well as harassment or threats, particularly via social media.

Misuse of Researcher Status

A Norwegian investigation into academic freedom of expression discusses the importance of clarity when researchers make public statements. It emphasizes that researchers from "uniformed institutions" (police academies, military university colleges, and institutions linked to healthcare) must consider how their opinions are perceived, especially in crisis situations. The report recommends that researchers consider themselves as ambassadors for academia. A German article discusses the risk of researchers misusing their position to promote political views, while politics may sometimes instrumentalize research for political purposes.

Politicization, Populism, and Controversial Topics

Pressure from external actors or institutions can lead to researcher self-censorship, threatening academic freedom. A social climate where certain topics are perceived as politicized can also restrict individual researchers' academic freedom. This is empirically supported by survey studies of Norwegian and German researchers.

Research reviews identify risks, including: politicization and populism can create a negative, aggressive public opinion toward researchers and academia; populist parties may threaten academic freedom from political positions of power; and populism indirectly threatens academic freedom when it challenges the liberal democratic principles underlying the social contract of science.

Ethical Requirements

The literature notes that academic freedom is not limitless; research must account for ethical and security considerations. Both Danish and German publications cite the importance of legislation in this regard. A Norwegian report discusses how ethical concerns can restrict academic freedom in international collaborations. Problems may arise when research ethics differ across countries, requiring researchers to adapt their research or dissemination due to political restrictions in partner countries.

Security Risks

Tensions or conflicts between states can manifest in academia, even though international collaboration is essential for advancing science. Several reports highlight the real risks associated with certain types of research. There is also a risk that academic freedom may be questioned when researchers appear to neglect these risks or fail to address them transparently. The debate generally centers around the fields of natural sciences, medicine, and technology, particularly in relation to the security risks of biological research, which have become more pronounced with globalization.

Research risks include biosafety (the safety of the research itself) and biosecurity (preventing terrorist use of scientific knowledge), such as when sensitive information is accessible to the public through open access. Research results can also be used for political influence, which means states must sometimes make decisions that could lead to limitations on academic freedom. In the Netherlands, for instance, national guidelines for knowledge security have been established, along with a national contact point for academia to consult on these matters.

Other Challenges

Additional topics are also discussed as challenges to academic freedom. One area extensively covered in various publications is the privatization and commercialization of research. Increased focus on marketability can influence researchers' focus, thus potentially restricting academic freedom. Universities' emphasis on excellence initiatives, entrepreneurship, external collaborations, and evaluation metrics can also create unnecessary bureaucracy, increasing administrative burdens on researchers and reducing their research time.

A related issue is lobbying by industry and interest groups and the dependence on private funding, especially in the natural sciences, medical fields, and technical disciplines. This influence may allow external actors to increasingly dictate the direction and dissemination of research. Researchers' rights to their ideas in relation to external funding are also debated.

Literature from several studied countries discusses that, regardless of funding source, there are often expectations for research to demonstrate social relevance. While legitimate, this requirement can limit academic freedom, especially considering that much research is taxpayer-funded. In Germany, some studies highlight the risk of one-sided knowledge production dominated by certain disciplines and warn that an overemphasis on students' employability may compromise research-based education.

Another theme is that external funding often comes with performance requirements, influencing researchers to select themes, collaborators, and publication formats accordingly. Research topics may become narrower as researchers align with funding calls and focus areas where funding is available.

Initiatives and Solutions

Although legislation partially addresses academic freedom, other initiatives exist across the studied countries to discuss challenges and ultimately safeguard academic freedom in researchers' everyday work.

Alliances and Networks

In all the studied countries except the Netherlands, the literature notes the formation of alliances or networks to defend academic freedom or the active involvement of existing organizations in this area. In Denmark, Finland, and Norway, these efforts involve various unions for researchers, as well as other examples such as interest groups for universities or scientific councils from multiple sectors.

In both Norway and Germany, networks have been formed by individual researchers to highlight threats to academic freedom generally or to

protest specific reforms. Some of these networks have launched campaigns to raise awareness of threats to academic freedom overall or specific issues.

Guidelines, Guidance, and Declarations of Intent

Various types of guidelines, guides, and declarations of intent on academic freedom are mentioned in the literature. These have been developed by university organizations, individual universities, and research unions. In Norway, political parties in parliament have issued a declaration of intent to respect academic freedom, and a Norwegian government report has also published guidelines on this topic.

In the Netherlands, the Academy of Sciences has published a code of conduct for academic work, including methodological and ethical standards as well as guidance on social security in academia. In Germany, a declaration of intent has been issued by the Ministry of Education and Research, along with statements from the Alliance of Science Organizations and a science network comprising politicians, university leaders, and professors, all supporting academic freedom. However, no formal evaluations of the impact of such campaigns and documents on practical academic freedom seem to exist.

UKÄ Reflections

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ) highlights that academic freedom worldwide is declining in more countries than it is increasing, according to the Academic Freedom Index (AFI). Since 2006, global academic freedom has declined, partly due to higher population growth in countries with lower academic freedom. Sweden has seen no significant decline in academic freedom according to AFI during this period, although there has been a decrease in some indicators. Sweden holds one of the highest AFI scores globally.

UKÄ observes that academic freedom is a current topic in all studied countries. Although the emphasis may vary by country, the theme of academic freedom generates substantial interest, with recurring issues. In several countries, researchers and instructors hesitate to address certain topics due to fear of institutional repercussions, lack of space in collegial discussions, or risks of harassment, threats, and intimidation.

UKÄ further notes that legal protections for academic freedom differ across countries. In some countries, it is protected in the constitution, while in others, it is safeguarded in university laws. Alliances and networks are commonly formed to support academic freedom in these countries, and general guidelines, guides, and declarations regarding academic freedom are often available.

Concluding Discussion

The following section discusses some of the report's main findings. In accordance with its government commission, UKÄ conducted case studies to gain a deeper understanding of how higher education institutions work to promote and protect academic freedom in line with Section 6 of Chapter 1 of the Higher Education Act, and foster a culture that allows the free search for, and free dissemination of knowledge. UKÄ also detailed the efforts of higher education institutions to promote and protect academic freedom and the culture referenced above. The assignment includes a national picture and an international perspective.

Responses from Higher Education Institutions to UKÄ's Inquiries

UKÄ posed questions to all state universities and the five largest private education providers. The questions covered each institution's efforts to promote and protect a culture that allows the free search for, and free dissemination of knowledge, and the frequency of academic freedom challenges at each institution.

Commitment to Academic Freedom

UKÄ's general impression is that most institutions demonstrate a commitment to academic freedom by joining various organizations and recommendations or through their overarching policy documents, including vision statements, strategies, goals, core values, and employee policies. The focus is primarily on the freedom of research, possibly due to the fact that research freedom has been regulated by law longer than the freedom of teaching. Since 2021, however, the Higher Education Act states that academic freedom, including freedom in education, should be generally promoted and protected within higher education institutions

Role of Faculty and Students in Academic Freedom

Many institutions highlight the importance of a decentralized organization with collegial governance and decision-making as central to promoting and protecting academic freedom. Collegial forums or advisory bodies focused on academic freedom are cited as beneficial by several institutions. Many institutions also emphasize the importance of establishing a seminar culture where academic freedom is respected. Staff training is also highlighted as a component in the work of protecting and promoting academic freedom.

Some higher education institutions also emphasize the importance of involving students in discussions about academic freedom. The preparatory work for the legal regulation highlights that teaching and other learning situations should foster an open climate of discussion, where diverse ideas and perspectives can be debated, and unexpected or even controversial results can be explored. The preparatory work also states that both teachers and students share a responsibility, in mutual respect, to promote and safeguard such a culture.

According to the Higher Education Act, students have the right to influence their education at higher education institutions. Institutions are required to ensure that students actively participate in efforts to further develop education. At the same time, an internal challenge to academic freedom highlighted by several institutions in their responses to UKÄ is that students sometimes attempt to influence the content and delivery of education. Institutions stress the importance of teacher teams and academic staff discussing and managing these situations.

UKÄ observes that it is crucial to ensure that both student influence and teachers' academic freedom are upheld within higher education institutions.

Frequency of Challenges to Academic Freedom

UKÄ notes that institutions found it challenging to answer questions about how often academic freedom is challenged within higher education institutions. Several institutions report that they lack systems or mechanisms to track instances where academic freedom is challenged. Many institutions also note that individuals who feel their academic freedom has been challenged may not always want or feel able to report such situations.

Regarding the internal frequency of challenges to academic freedom, no institution reported that it occurs frequently. Nearly half stated that it was rare, while the remaining institutions refrained from providing a clear stance. As for the external frequency of challenges to academic freedom, one institution noted it as frequent, a few noted it as rare, and the majority did not provide a clear response.

Internal and external challenges

In their responses, institutions describe both internal and external challenges to academic freedom. They also provide examples of situations where academic freedom has been challenged and the actions taken in response.

UKÄ notes that institutions often feel equipped to handle internal challenges but find external challenges more difficult to manage. This is especially true with incidents of harassment, hatred, and threats, where

institutions report cases of researchers changing research directions or annulled planned seminars. Most institutions report that harassment and threats toward researchers and instructors have increased, posing a challenge to academic freedom, particularly in certain fields.

Survey of Teachers, Researchers, and Doctoral Students

As part of the work on the government assignment, UKÄ conducted a survey in the fall of 2023 aimed at teachers, researchers, and doctoral students at Swedish universities and university colleges. The survey was sent to approximately 10,000 individuals, and the questions concerned various aspects of academic freedom. The response rate was 38 percent.

Importance of Academic Freedom, Knowledge, and Discussion

UKÄ observes that nearly all Swedish teachers, researchers, and doctoral students consider academic freedom vital to their work. At the same time, many feel they lack sufficient knowledge about the topic. Only about half believe they have the necessary knowledge of academic freedom, with a quarter indicating they do not have adequate understanding. Seven in ten express a desire to learn more. When asked if their institution has offered any courses or training related to academic freedom, only slightly more than 10% responded affirmatively.

Discussions on academic freedom primarily occur with colleagues. Teachers, researchers, and doctoral students discuss academic freedom much more frequently with their peers than with their immediate supervisors, students, or collaboration partners. About a third report never discussing academic freedom with their immediate supervisor, and about the same proportion never discuss it with their students or partners.

Perception of Academic Freedom Challenges

Every other teacher, researcher, and doctoral student believes that academic freedom at Swedish universities is challenged today. UKÄ notes that significantly fewer individuals feel that their own academic freedom is challenged, with just under one-third reporting this. People working in the social sciences, as well as in the humanities and the arts, are more likely than those in other research fields to both perceive academic freedom as generally challenged and to feel that their own academic freedom is under threat. Professors and senior lecturers experience their academic freedom as being challenged to a greater extent than other professional categories.

Challenges to Academic Freedom

Respondents who believe academic freedom is under threat today were invited to provide free-text responses about what they perceive as challenges. UKÄ has compiled and categorized these responses. The most common responses did not primarily concern individual academic freedom or the relationship between individuals and institutions, as covered in UKÄ's mandate. The overwhelmingly common responses cited political influence and various aspects of the research funding system as challenges to academic freedom. Respondents often mentioned both factors together, describing political influence as manifesting through research funding. An additional factor, although outside the scope of this mandate but frequently mentioned by researchers, instructors, and doctoral students, was the regulations in relation to the Act on the Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (2003:460).

The most frequently reported challenge that falls within the mandate's scope is homogeneity within academic environments. Respondents described a conformity in the workplace, with individuals feeling unable to speak up and feeling pressure to align with established norms. There are reports of a low tolerance for divergent views, with some feeling that this has worsened over time, creating conformity in academic discussions and research focus.

Several less commonly mentioned but significant factors also emerged in the responses, including harassment and threats, often from external actors and via social media. Researchers feel that strong societal opinions on what should or should not be researched – and how research should be conducted – are the basis for much of this harassment and threat. Concerns were also raised about diminishing collegial governance and decision-making, with some reporting a shift toward more hierarchical management and elements of New Public Management, which are seen as challenges to academic freedom.

Experienced Situations and Their Impact on Academic Freedom

The survey asked participants to describe various situations they had personally encountered and to indicate whether they felt these situations challenged their academic freedom. The questions were divided into experiences related to research and those related to teaching.

The most commonly reported situation in the research context was a perceived homogenization of research and academic discussion due to informal networks and friendships, with 46 percent of respondents reporting this experience, and 35 percent of those felt it challenged their academic freedom. The second most common situation, experienced by 29 percent of respondents, was that colleagues do not permit ideas and

perspectives that challenge consensus in the research environment, with 45 percent of those perceiving it as a threat to their academic freedom.

Certain research-related situations, though experienced by fewer respondents, were perceived as more challenging to academic freedom by those affected. Five percent of respondents had experienced pressure from colleagues to censor research results, and 77 percent of these individuals felt this challenged their academic freedom. Similarly, 4 percent of respondents had experienced an institution or university refusing to endorse their research proposal for reasons they viewed as arbitrary, with 77 percent of these respondents feeling this threatened their academic freedom.

In the context of teaching, the most commonly reported situations were students exerting pressure to remove or add course content (21 percent) and students refusing to accept an open discussion environment (17 percent), with 44 percent and 45 percent, respectively, perceiving these as challenges to their academic freedom.

Some teaching-related situations were experienced by fewer respondents but more frequently perceived as challenging to academic freedom by those affected. Five percent had experienced pressure from their supervisor to alter their teaching approach, with 56 percent perceiving it as a threat to their academic freedom. Eight percent reported experiencing pressure from colleagues to change their teaching approach, with 54 percent perceiving it as a threat.

Respondents were asked if they had experienced threats or harassment related to their research or teaching, whether personally, by letter, email, phone, or social platforms. Seven percent had experienced this in relation to research, with 51 percent of them perceiving it as a threat to their academic freedom. Eight percent had experienced this in relation to teaching, with 39 percent feeling it challenged their academic freedom.

UKÄ notes that there is no broad consensus on whether these situations constitute challenges to academic freedom. The proportion of respondents who felt their academic freedom was challenged by these experiences ranged from 34 to 77 percent for research-related situations and from 34 to 56 percent for teaching-related situations. This variation could reflect different interpretations of academic freedom, but it may also be that some researchers and teachers feel they can withstand the challenge, thus maintaining their academic freedom.

Consequences When Individual Academic Freedom is Challenged

UKÄ observes that three-quarters of respondents who felt their academic freedom had been challenged reported a change in their behavior. The most common responses were changing research focus and avoiding

topics that might be perceived as controversial. Less common but notable changes included avoiding communicating research findings or discontinuing collaborations with external parties. Many also commented that they have consciously chosen not to alter their role as researchers and teachers, despite experiencing situations they perceive as challenges to academic freedom. They describe it as "standing firm" or "standing up for" their academic freedom.

Few Seek and Receive Support from Institutions

Few respondents sought help from their higher education institution when they felt their academic freedom was challenged. Among those who feel their academic freedom is currently challenged, less than a quarter sought support. Only 35 percent knew where to turn if their academic freedom was challenged. UKÄ notes that even those who know where to turn often choose not to do so. Among those who feel their academic freedom is challenged and know where to turn, 58 percent have still not sought support from their institution. Among those who did seek support, only 17 percent felt they received adequate assistance.

Case Studies

Four case studies have been conducted to illustrate how academic freedom can be promoted or protected in education and research when it faces internal or external threats. These cases are not exhaustive descriptions of all aspects in which academic freedom may be challenged but are individual examples.

The first case study examines how an institution fosters a culture that supports academic freedom in research and teaching. It highlights how an academic culture can develop and be shaped in day-to-day interactions among colleagues. The institution's seminar activities were frequently noted during interviews as key to a dynamic academic discussion and collegial security, both viewed as central to upholding academic freedom.

The second case study illustrates a university's efforts to protect academic freedom from external threats and pressures. It stresses the importance of coordinated and adequate support from the institution, ensuring that individual employees are not left to navigate situations where academic freedom is challenged alone. Institutional leadership can and should set an example, demonstrating how academic discussions should be conducted and how academic criticism should be articulated.

The third case study explores what can happen to a teacher's work environment following an incident in the classroom. A conflict in a lecture or seminar setting can affect both the teacher's work environment and the quality of teaching. Even if the teacher or leadership initially does not consider the incident particularly serious, it is crucial to refer to

available support resources as needed. There is a need for dialogue with students about what constitutes a positive academic culture and the climate of discourse in lecture halls and seminar rooms.

The fourth case study highlights a university's efforts to safeguard the free dissemination of knowledge in relation to external partners and funding. When partners or research funders offer large sums, it can be difficult for individual researchers to resist influence or pressure, such as relinquishing the right to freely publish. If researchers are unaware of the relevant regulations and thus may avoid researching certain topics, this could also inhibit academic freedom. The university and its legal advisors hold a significant responsibility to support researchers.

International Perspective

UKÄ observes that, according to the Academic Freedom Index (AFI), academic freedom is decreasing in more countries than it is increasing. Since 2006, academic freedom worldwide has declined, partly due to population growth in countries with lower academic freedom. Sweden has not seen a significant decrease in academic freedom according to AFI during this period, although certain indicators have dropped slightly. Sweden remains among the countries with the highest AFI values globally. Among the indicators that constitute the index, Sweden scores lowest in institutional autonomy, which measures the extent to which universities exercise practical institutional autonomy – a factor outside the scope of this report's mandate.

Academic freedom is a crucial topic in all countries covered in the international review. Discussions about academic freedom in other countries, as in Sweden, often address topics beyond the scope of this mandate. Although there are variations in focus in different countries, similar themes emerge, showing that academic freedom is a widely engaging issue. For instance, researchers and teachers in several countries refrain from addressing certain topics, either due to fear of institutional repercussions, because the collegial debate is limited, or concerns over harassment and threats. There are also examples of limitations to collegial debate and critique, which, according to the literature reviewed, can lead to weakened collegiality and adverse effects on academic freedom.

The legal frameworks for protecting academic freedom differ among countries. In some, academic freedom is protected by the constitution, while in others, it is safeguarded by higher education law. Alliances and networks promoting academic freedom are common across the countries studied. Guidelines and declarations of intent on academic freedom are also frequently found.

Summary observations

From an international perspective, Sweden generally has good academic freedom, particularly regarding the aspects covered by this assignment, namely individual academic freedom through the relationship between the individual and the higher education institution. The results of the assignment show that there are challenges to academic freedom in Sweden today, and thus opportunities to strengthen the efforts to promote and protect it further.

The culture at a university, faculty, department, or work group is fundamental for the successful promotion and protection of academic freedom. University leadership is responsible, through the provisions of the Higher Education Act, for safeguarding a culture that allows free search for and the free dissemination of knowledge. Some teachers, researchers, and doctoral students testify to experiencing a homogenization within the academic environment, where there is sometimes a perceived lack of openness, and a tendency to avoid standing out. According to the preparatory works, teaching and other learning situations should be characterized by an open climate for discussion, where different ideas and perspectives can be debated, and unexpected or even controversial results can be brought forward. UKÄ notes that it can be difficult to create such a teaching environment when those who are supposed to teach feel that certain opinions are unwelcome. The quality of research and education may also be compromised if knowledge-seeking and dissemination are restricted.

The preparatory works state that both teachers and students, in mutual respect, have a responsibility to promote and protect a culture that allows free search for and the free dissemination of knowledge. Some researchers, teachers, and doctoral students feel that students do not always accept that the learning situation should be characterized by an open climate for discussion. UKÄ perceives that, today, there is sometimes a lack of general discussion between teachers and students about seminar culture and the ground rules for how discussions should be conducted and how participants should engage with one another in the teaching situation. Ongoing dialogue with students about what constitutes a good academic culture and how the climate in lecture halls and seminar rooms is linked to academic freedom and the working environment of teachers could help foster greater understanding. It is also important to engage students and student unions in these discussions.

Universities emphasize that a decentralized organization with collegial governance and decision-making processes is central to promoting and protecting academic freedom. However, some researchers, teachers, and doctoral students express concern over decreasing collegial governance and decision-making at universities, viewing this as a challenge to academic freedom. UKÄ notes that there may be a discrepancy in these

views, and it is important for these issues to be discussed at the universities.

The preparatory statements for the Higher Education Act indicate that free search for and the free dissemination of knowledge sometimes involve asking controversial questions and presenting unexpected results, which can carry risks and, in the worst case, expose individuals to increased vulnerability to hate and threats. Since research and higher education contribute to knowledge and societal development, it is crucial that fear of threats and hate does not affect the topics that become subjects of knowledge-seeking and dissemination. According to the preparatory statements, this accentuates the responsibility of university leadership for the work environment and for preventing hate, threats, violence, and harassment within the sector. The assignment shows that teachers, researchers, and doctoral students do not always ask for help when their academic freedom is challenged or threatened. The survey results indicate that even those teachers, researchers, and doctoral students who are familiar with their institution's support structures choose not to seek assistance when their academic freedom is challenged. UKÄ sees this as problematic and believes that support must reach those who have been affected so that this does not negatively impact academic freedom. It is a challenge for universities and their work environment efforts that they are not always informed when the academic freedom of researchers, teachers, and doctoral students is under threat.

It is fundamental to the operations of universities – both education and research – that there is an open and free conversation where researchers, teachers, doctoral students, and students engage with each other's arguments in a factual manner. The conversation should be critical and clear, yet constructive and characterized by mutual respect between participants. The general public also has a legitimate interest in transparency and should be able to participate in the debate on the same terms.

At the same time, it is clear that the perception among many in higher education today is that academic freedom extends beyond what is regulated in the Higher Education Act. Discussions about academic freedom need to be conducted more extensively at universities and with other stakeholders. UKÄ hopes that this report will serve as a foundation for a constructive and fact-based discussion about this important issue for universities, higher education, and society.

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The Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslersämbetet – UKÄ) is to contribute to strengthening Swedish higher education and Sweden as a knowledge society. We review the quality of higher education programmes; we analyse and follow-up trends within higher education and we monitor the rights of students.

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What is your experience of academic freedom in Sweden?

In this questionnaire, when we use the term academic freedom, we mean a culture that allows the free search for knowledge and the free dissemination of knowledge in both research and teaching (in accordance with the 2020 research policy bill (Bill 2020/21:60))

SCB

> **The questionnaire will be scanned electronically, so when you fill in the questionnaire, please remember to:**
>
> - Use a ballpoint pen
>
> - Mark your answers with an x like this: ☒
>
> - If you need to change your answer, cover the entire box: ■

Part I

1. Do you work with research and/or teaching today?

☐ Yes, only with research

☐ Yes, only with teaching

☐ Yes, both with research and teaching

☐ No ⟶ *Since the survey is aimed at those who currently work in research and/or teaching, there will be no more questions, but we still want you to send us the survey.*

2. Which of the following most closely describes your position?

☐ PhD student

☐ Career development position (postdoctoral researcher, associate senior lecturer, postdoctoral research fellow)

☐ Senior lecturer

☐ Professor

☐ Lecturer

☐ Other research and teaching staff

3. Do you feel that academic freedom is an important prerequisite for your work as a researcher/teacher?
In this questionnaire, when we use the term academic freedom, we mean a culture that allows the free search for knowledge and the free dissemination of knowledge in both research and teaching (in accordance with the 2020 research policy bill (Bill 2020/21:60))

☐ Yes, very important

☐ Yes, somewhat important

☐ No

☐ Don't know

4. How often do you discuss aspects of academic freedom with your …?

	Every day	A few times a week	A few times a month	A few times a year	Never	Not applicable
a. … colleagues	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. … immediate superior	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. … students	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. … collaborative partners outside of academia	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. **Do you feel that academic freedom at Swedish higher education institutions is currently being challenged?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know   *Go to question 7*

6. **In what way?**
Please describe:

7. **During your academic career in Sweden, have you ever felt that your academic freedom has been challenged?**

☐ Yes, several times

☐ Yes, a few times

☐ No

☐ Don't know

8. **Do you feel that your own academic freedom is currently being challenged?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know   *Go to question 14*

9. **Where is the threat to your academic freedom coming from?**

☐ Individuals/stakeholders active at your higher education institution, e.g., superiors, colleagues, students

☐ Individuals/stakeholders outside of your higher education institution

☐ Both individuals/stakeholders within and outside of your higher education institution

10. **Is the challenge to your academic freedom related to research or teaching?**

☐ Related to research

☐ Related to teaching

☐ Both research and teaching

11. **When you felt that your academic freedom was challenged, did you seek support from your higher education institution?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know   *Go to question 13*

12. **Did you receive support from your higher education institution when you asked for help?**

☐ Yes, I received sufficient support

☐ Yes, but it was not sufficient

☐ No, I did not receive any support

☐ Don't know

13. **If you feel that your academic freedom has been challenged, did the experience cause you to change your behavior in any of the following ways?**
Multiple answers may be selected.

☐ I have changed the focus of my research

☐ I have switched higher education institution/department

☐ I avoid research on subjects that can be seen as controversial

☐ I have terminated cooperation with external collaborative partners

☐ I avoid teaching subjects that can be seen as controversial

☐ I avoid communicating about my research

☐ In another way, specifically:

☐ No

14. **Do you think you have the necessary knowledge about academic freedom in your position as a researcher/teacher?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

15. **Would you like to learn more about academic freedom?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

16. **To what degree do you feel that your current higher education institution (e.g. through your department) actively works to promote and defend your academic freedom?**

- ☐ To a large extent
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ To a minor extent
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Don't know

17. **Are you aware of any policies or guidelines at your current higher education institution on how to promote and defend the academic freedom of researchers/teachers?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

18. **Has your current higher education institution ever offered courses/training you can attend that includes aspects of academic freedom?**

- ☐ Yes, I have been offered such courses/training and have participated
- ☐ Yes, I have been offered such courses/training but have not participated
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

19. **Do you know where to turn at your current higher education institution if your academic freedom is challenged?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

Part II

Question 20 – about your academic culture

In the 2020 research policy bill (Bill 2020/21:60), focus is placed on the leadership of the higher education institution having responsibility for promoting and defending a culture that allows the free search for knowledge and free dissemination, but it also notes that there is a collegial responsibility to use academic freedom to contribute to and disseminate high quality knowledge. The examples below are taken from UKÄ's pilot study that interviewed researchers and teaching staff. Base your answers on your experience from your academic career at your Swedish higher education institution.

Experience from your research environment
If your position does not currently include research, go to question 20.2 – Teaching.

20.1 a) Have you experienced …

b) If YES, has this challenged your academic freedom, i.e., your ability to freely search for and disseminate knowledge?

		a) Yes	a) No	b) Yes	b) No
a)	... that colleagues at your workplace do not permit ideas and perspectives in the research environment that challenge consensus?	☐	☐	☐	☐
b)	… pressure from colleagues at your workplace to change your research question or method against your will?	☐	☐	☐	☐
c)	… that informal networks and bonds of friendship exist at your workplace that homogenize research and academic discussions?	☐	☐	☐	☐
d)	… pressure from colleagues at your workplace which censors your research findings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
e)	… pressure from a stakeholder outside of academia which censors your research findings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
f)	… pressure, such as through agreements, from another country that censors your research findings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
g)	… pressure not to disseminate your research findings?	☐	☐	☐	☐
h)	… that someone has contacted your employer to prevent you from conducting your research?	☐	☐	☐	☐
i)	… that colleagues have discredited you regarding your research, such as on social media?	☐	☐	☐	☐
j)	… threats and/or hateful comments related to your research expressed in letters, emails, phone calls or on social media?	☐	☐	☐	☐
k)	… that your department or higher education institution refused to approve your application for research funding on, in your opinion, arbitrary grounds?	☐	☐	☐	☐

Experience from teaching
If your position does not currently include teaching, go to question 21.

20.2 a) Have you experienced …	Yes	No	b) If YES, has this challenged your academic freedom, i.e., your ability to freely search for and disseminate knowledge? Yes	No
a) ... that students exert pressure to remove or add course content from your course?	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) … that students have discredited you in your role as a teacher, such as on social media?	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) … threats and/or hateful comments related to your teaching expressed in letters, emails, phone calls or on social media?	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) … that one or more students have submitted complaints about you because of your teaching?	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) … students who do not accept that the learning environment is to be characterized by open discussion?	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) … that your employer does not support you when you have been harassed or discredited by students?	☐	☐	☐	☐
g) … pressure from your immediate superior to change how you conduct your teaching?	☐	☐	☐	☐
h) … pressure from your colleagues to change how you conduct your teaching?	☐	☐	☐	☐

21. Do you feel that your academic freedom has been challenged in any other way than described in the questions above?

☐ Yes, specifically:
(write in the box)

☐ No
☐ Don't know

Thank you for your participation!