

Quality assurance and academic freedom

Workshop at EQAF – Budapest, 13 November 2025

Caroline Tovatt

Martin Bergman



Objectives of the workshop

- To share experiences **on good academic culture and its connection to academic freedom**
- To explore how different countries approach and experience quality assurance in relation to academic freedom
- Real-world examples for practical understanding
- Group discussions and presentations

Overall questions

- How can the Quality Assurance System strengthen the individual academic freedom in research and education?
- What constitutes a good academic culture in the research and education and how can it be protected and promoted?
- How can HEIs support their employees when their academic freedom is challenged?

Quality assurance and academic freedom

ESG (1.1): *Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that supports academic integrity and freedom.*

In Sweden the HEIs must:

- work actively to **implement academic freedom in practice**, in both in research and education.
- promote a culture that allows **the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge**.

Academic freedom in Sweden

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



- A government commission
- Report published May 2024
- Translated to English

uka.se/academicfreedom

Academic freedom in Sweden

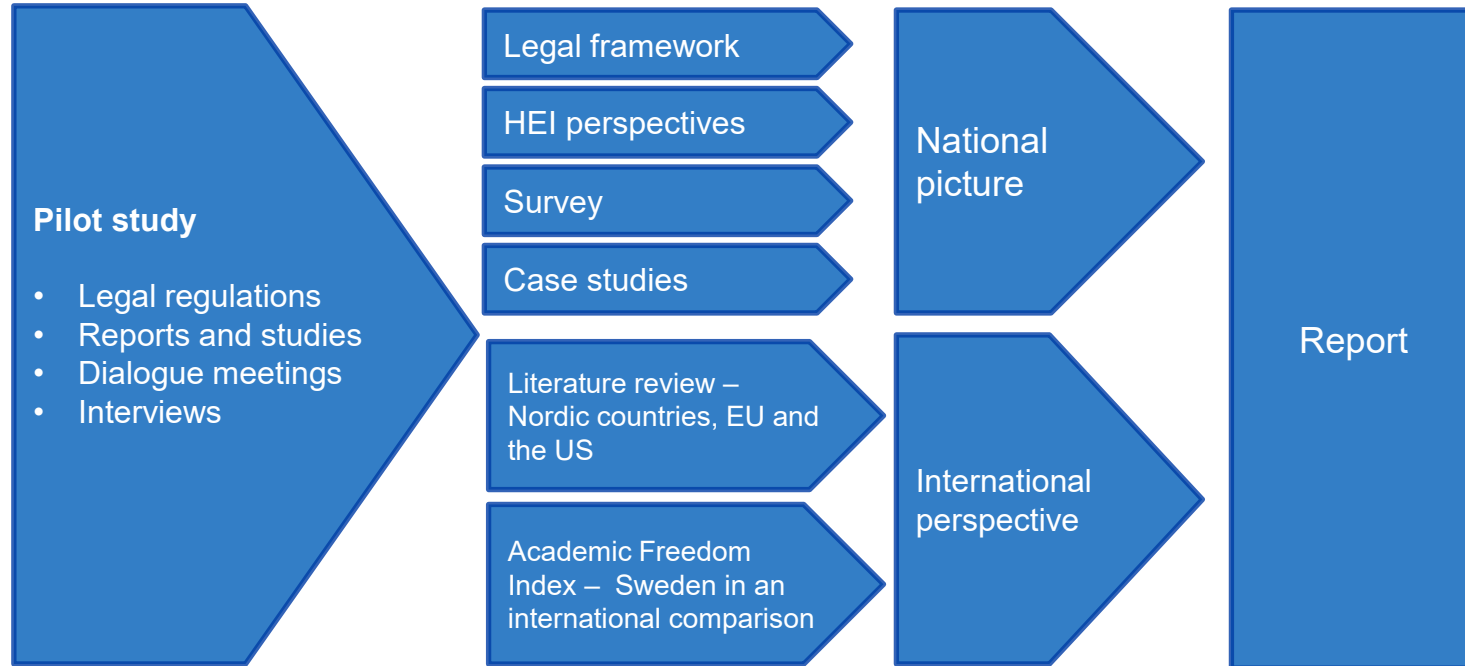
Government Commission on Higher Education
Institutions' Efforts to Promote and Protect
Academic Freedom



Academic freedom - **the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge**

The individual academic freedom - **the relation between the individual and the institution**, not the relation between the institution and the state (institutional autonomy)

Implementation



Academic freedom – an international perspective

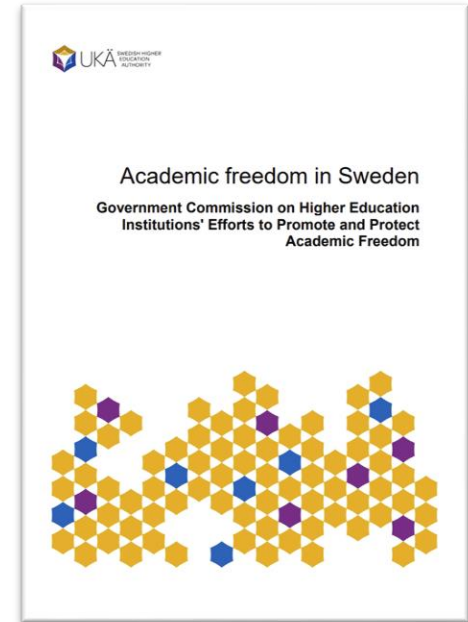
Country	2014	2024
Sweden	0.95	0.94
Finland	0.94	0.83*
Denmark	0.95	0.89
Norway	0.90	0.85
Iceland	0.93	0.90
Germany	0.96	0.88*
The Netherlands	0.88	0.76
USA	0.92	0.68*

Source: *Academic Freedom Index – Update 2025*

*statistically significant decrease between 2014 and 2024.

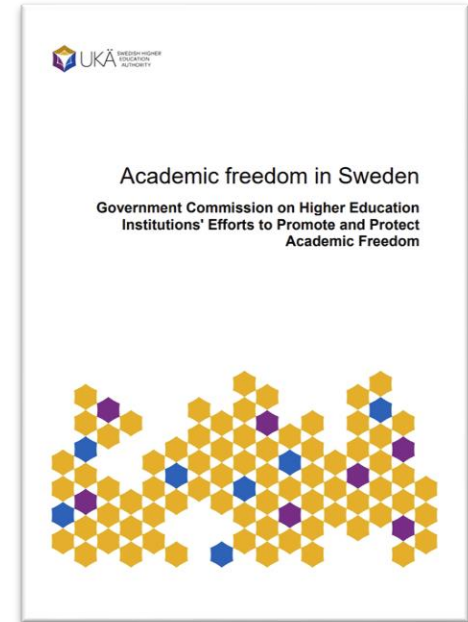
Some findings

- Fear of threats and hate can affect the topics that become subjects for research and dissemination.
- HEI employees experience homogenization within the academic environment, lack of openness and a tendency to avoid standing out.
- Even employees who are familiar with their institution's support structures choose not to seek assistance when their academic freedom is challenged.



Conclusions

- From an international perspective, **Sweden generally has good academic freedom**
- Still, the **academic culture** at Swedish HEI does not always promote or protect the free search for and free dissemination of knowledge
- There are challenging issues regarding the balance between employees' **freedom of expression**, the HEI responsibility to protect **academic freedom**, and its duty to maintain **a safe working environment**.



Workshop arrangement

1. Form discussion groups (5-6 in each group)
2. Appoint one person to take notes and present the results
3. Read the case presented in the table
4. Discuss the questions
5. Summaries your discussions

Presentations

Each group has X minutes to present:

1. Describe the case shortly
2. Describe similarities and differences between countries in how their HEI:s and/or National Quality Assurance systems relate to academic freedom.
3. Give suggestions on how the quality assurance system could strengthen academic freedom in education and/or research.

Thank you!

Feedback:

Mentimeter: menti.com Code:

Follow-Up:

Caroline.tovatt@uka.se

English webb: <https://www.uka.se/academicfreedom>