



Threats, hatred and undue influence are a reality for many researchers and university teachers. Even so, the majority of victims choose not to report what they have experienced. This report analyses why this silence is so widespread and what needs to be done for more people to have the courage to report incidents.

Threats and hatred

Why don't university teachers and researchers report them?



Threats and hatred - why don't university teachers
and researchers report them? (English version)

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Threats and hatred - why don't university teachers and researchers report them?

Threats, hatred and undue influence are a reality for many researchers and university teachers in Sweden. Nevertheless, a majority of the victims choose not to report what they have experienced. This report summarises the results of a member survey, analyses why silence is so widespread and discusses what it would take for more people to dare to report incidents when they occur.

What is the problem?

Threats, hatred and undue influence towards university teachers and researchers are a problem in Swedish higher education. A member survey by the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers (SULF) shows that 44 per cent of respondents feel they have been subjected to some form of threat, hatred or undue influence. Despite this, many choose not to report what they have been subjected to.

The consequences for the individual are serious. Many report symptoms of stress and anxiety and that they have become more cautious in their interactions with students and colleagues. Some choose to no longer teach certain subjects or to avoid research in areas that may be perceived as controversial. In practice, this amounts to self-censorship and a restriction of academic freedom.

The purpose of this report is to shed light on this silence: Why do teachers and researchers not report threats, hatred and undue influence? The report is based on a survey sent to SULF members in the spring of 2024. More information on the survey can be found in Appendix 1. The report focuses on highlighting the structural and psychological barriers that lead many people to choose to remain silent.

Proposals for action:

1. Create clear and secure reporting channels.
2. Ensure concrete action is taken when incidents are reported.
3. Improve support for victims.
4. Counter the normalisation of threats, hatred and undue influence.

Survey results

The following is a summary of the main findings of the survey.

Figure 1 shows that almost half of the respondents have experienced some form of threat, hatred or undue influence.

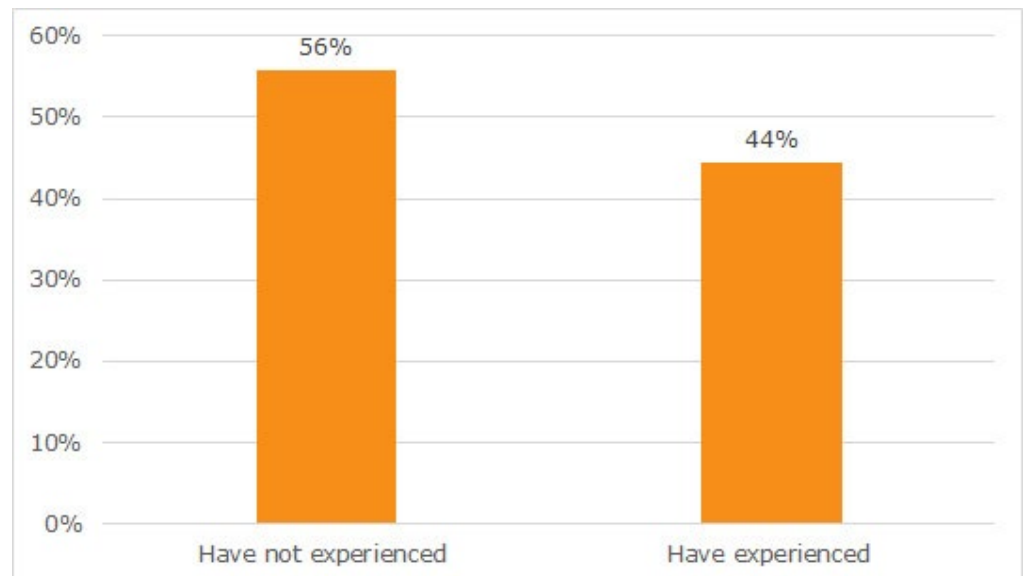


Figure1: Experience of threats, hatred or undue influence.

Figure 2 shows that the most common experiences are inappropriate or troubling appeals for empathy or loyalty, threatening messages or statements and other forms of undue pressure. A total of 23 per cent of respondents have been subjected to threats, violence, stalking and/or attempted bribery.

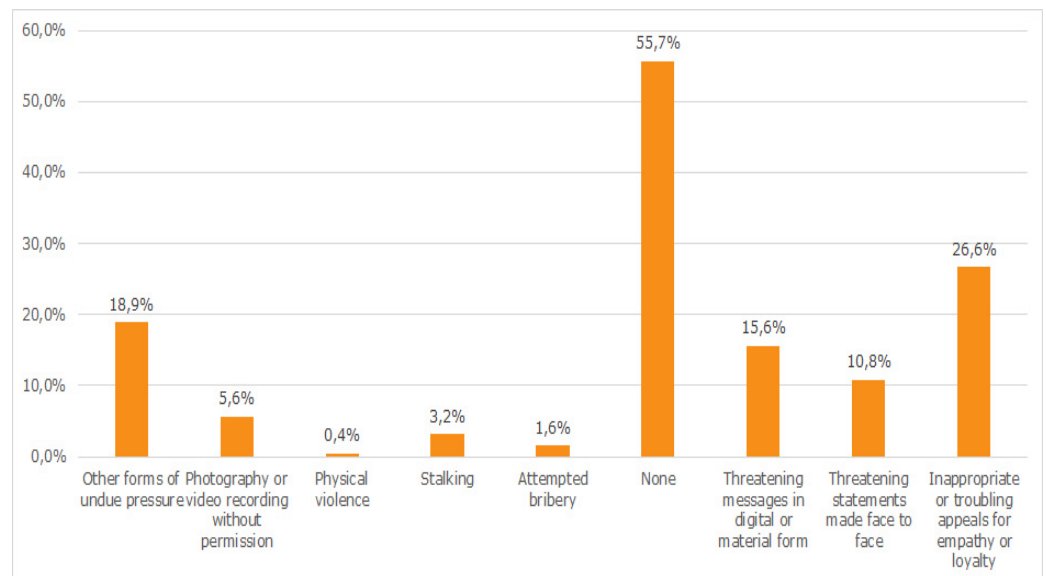


Figure 2: Forms of threat, hatred or undue influence. Percentage of respondents who said they had been subjected to a specific type of hate, threat or undue influence. ¹

¹ Percentage of all respondents, regardless of whether they were victims or not. The total may add up to more than 100%, as respondents can select multiple forms of threat, hatred or undue influence.

Figure 3 shows that the most common sources of threats, hatred or undue influence are students (56%) and colleagues (52%), indicating that threats often come from within the academic environment.

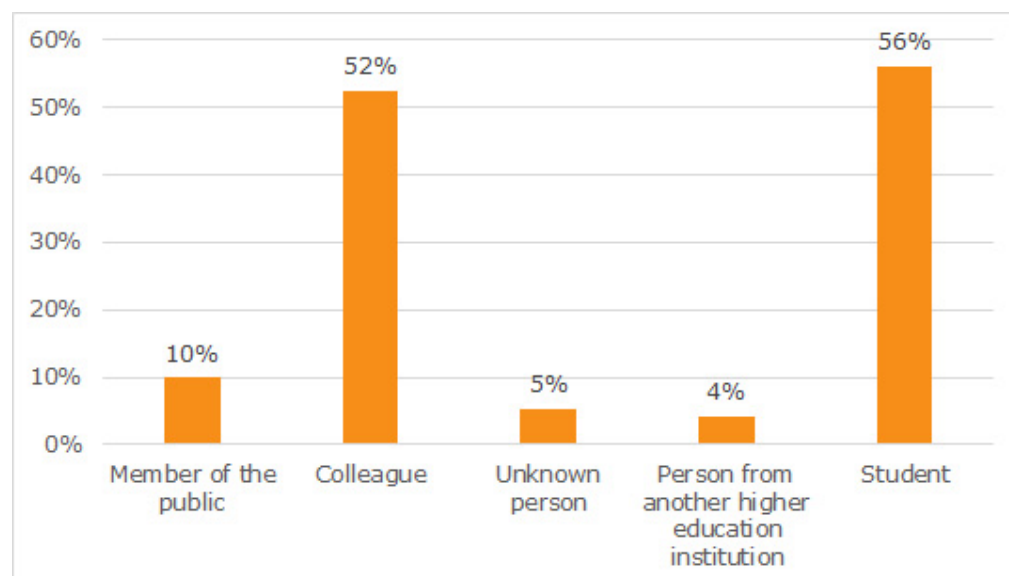


Figure 3: Sources of threats, hatred or undue influence. Percentage of victims who identify the perpetrator as belonging to a specific group.²

Figure 4 shows that a clear majority, 57 per cent, of those who were subjected to threats, hatred or undue influence did not report the incident to their higher education institution. Only 43 per cent chose to inform their employer, which confirms that silence is widespread despite the seriousness of the incidents. This is also in line with results from the Swedish Higher Education Authority's survey on academic freedom, where an even higher proportion, (71%), said they had not sought support from their employer. The chart therefore highlights a structural problem in the higher education sector: A lack of confidence that reporting incidents will lead to real change.

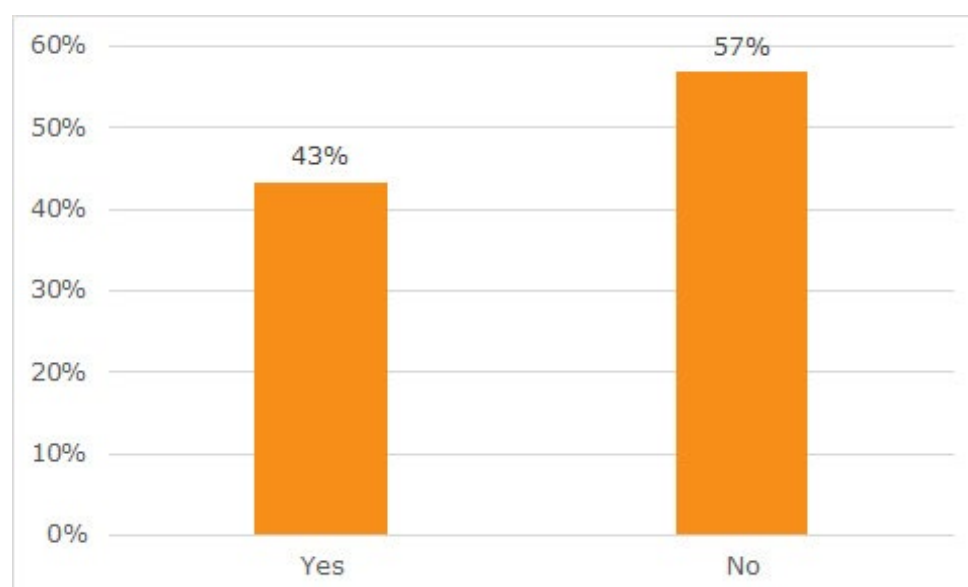


Figure 4: Did you report the incident to the higher education institution? Percentage of victims of hate, threats or undue influence who reported.

² May add up to more than 100%, as respondents could choose several groups.

Figure 5 shows that women are somewhat more likely than men to have reported the incident to their higher education institution - 45% and 41%, respectively.

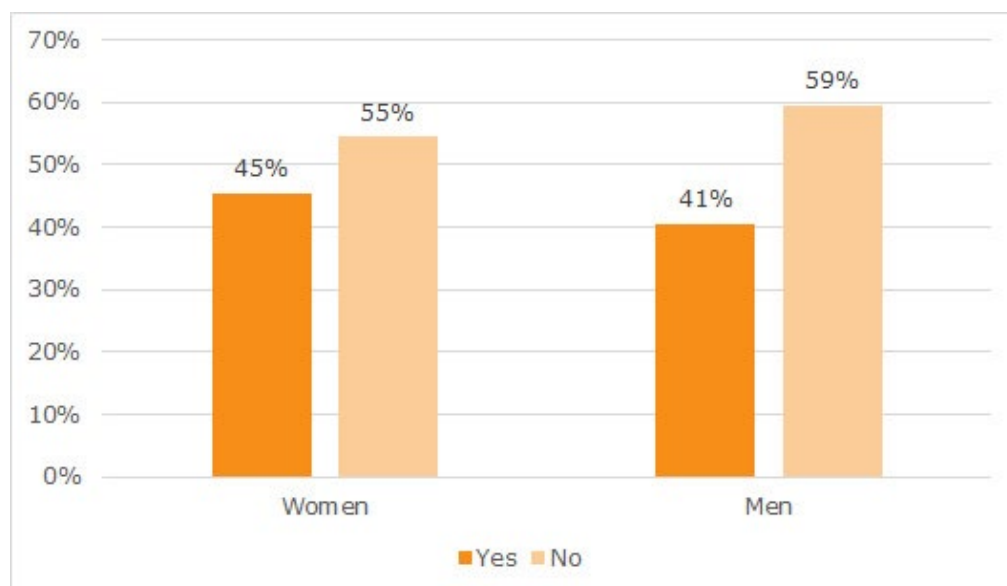


Figure 5: Did you report the incident to the higher education institution? Reporting by gender.

Figure 6 shows that the propensity to report incidents to the employer varies according to form of employment. Among those with fixed-term contracts, only 36% have reported incidents, while the corresponding rate for permanent employees is 44%.

The lower reporting rate among fixed-term employees may indicate a greater fear of negative consequences, such as concerns about not having their contracts extended. It is also possible that these individuals are less aware of reporting procedures or have less access to support structures. This pattern underlines the importance of strengthening the protection of particularly vulnerable groups in academia - not least those with precarious employment.

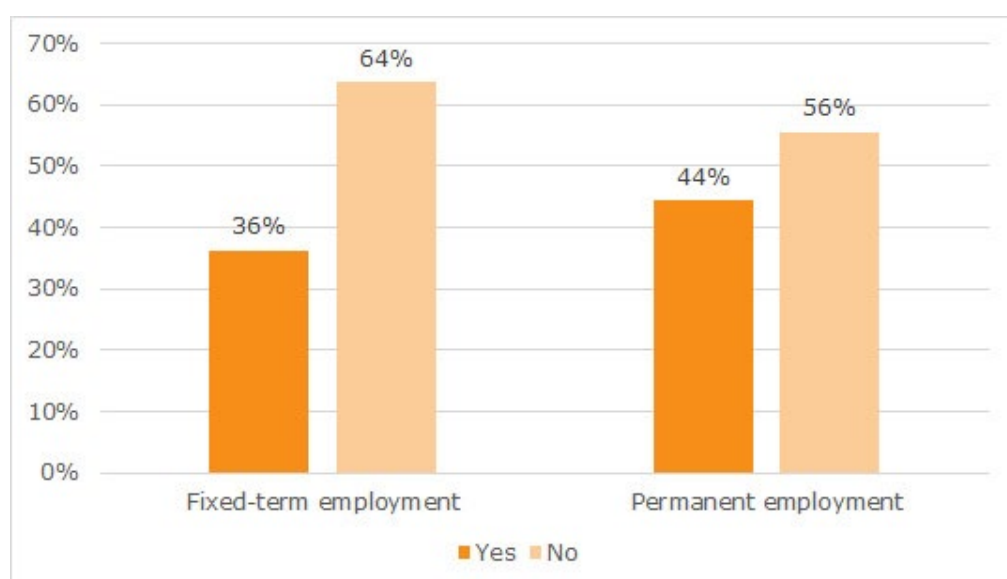


Figure 6: Did you report the incident to the higher education institution? Reporting by type of employment.

Why do people not report incidents?

The following themes have been identified in the 148 free text responses from respondents to the survey:

Lack of confidence in the institution: Many respondents write that they do not believe that the employer will take action if they report an incident. Previous experiences of non-action are a contributing factor to this mistrust.

"HR said that it was not their responsibility, despite clear evidence."

Fear of reprisals: A recurring fear is that reporting may lead to negative consequences for the person's career, especially if the perpetrator is in a position of power or authority.

"I was warned that this colleague would seek revenge."

Emotional exhaustion: The process of reporting is often described as a heavy psychological burden.

"Reporting it to HR made my situation worse."

Institutional inefficiencies: Reporting rarely leads to action, creating a sense of resignation.

"Nothing happened when I reported it. I don't have the energy to try again."

Normalisation of threatening behaviour: Some people no longer see what they have been exposed to as abnormal.

"This is just how it is. You have to put up with it."

Inadequate support and protection: Few feel they receive any real support after reporting.

"I was left alone with the problem."

Figure 7 shows that the main reasons for not reporting were that people dealt with the problem themselves, that they did not think it would lead anywhere or that it was seen as part of the job.

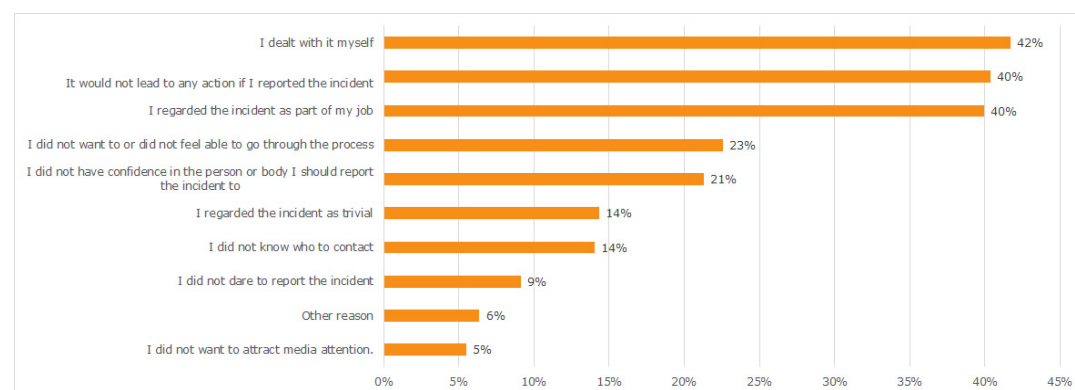


Figure 7: Reasons for not reporting. Percentage of those who did not report an incident.

Figure 8 shows the types of support provided or action taken after a respondent reported the incident to their employer. However, the most common response is that no action was taken or no support was provided at all. This was the case for almost a third of those who had reported incidents.

Of those who received some form of response, the most common were counselling and psychological support, (approximately 25%), and changes to communication processes or the work environment, (approximately 20%). Filing a police report or legal action occurred in around 15% of cases, and support from colleagues or management was mentioned by around 10%.

Overall, the results suggest that reporting often does not lead to concrete or tangible action. This may help to explain why so many people choose not to report incidents at all and why people's confidence in the system for dealing with intimidation is so low.

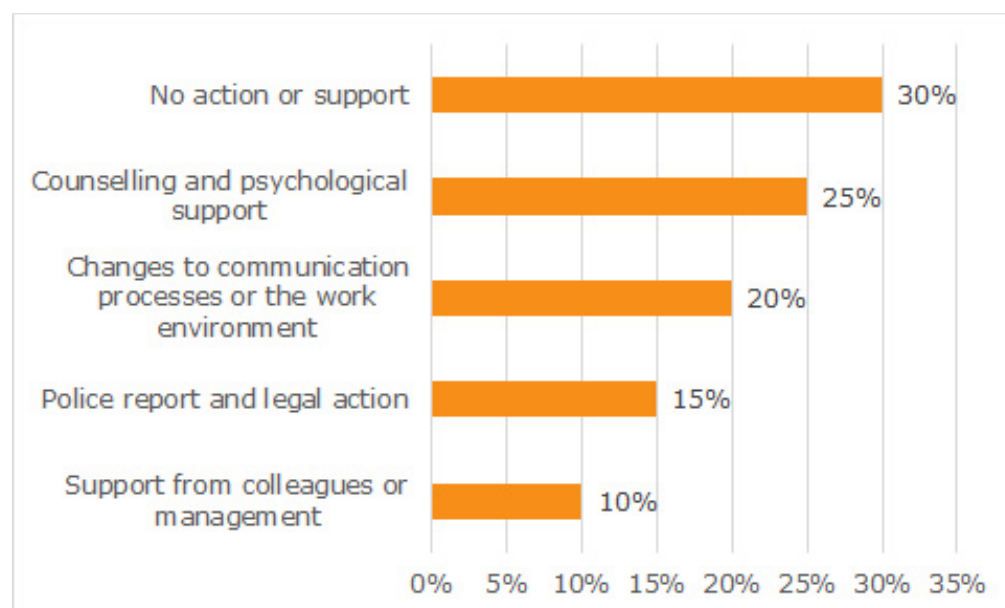


Figure 8: Forms of action and support. Percentage of those who reported the incident to the employer.

The consequences of not reporting

The fact that so many people choose not to report threats, hatred and undue influence has serious implications for the work environment and academic culture. Intimidating behaviour is allowed continue without any consequences. Silence reinforces a culture of fear and can lead to increased self-censorship and reduced academic freedom.

What needs to be done to encourage more people to report incidents?

Increasing the likelihood of people to report threats, hatred and undue influence requires:

- Clear and safe reporting channels with guaranteed protection against reprisals.
- Greater confidence that reporting leads to real action.
- Training and information for both employees and managers on how to deal with intimidation.
- Stronger support from management.
- A culture change to counter the normalisation of hatred, threats and undue influence.

Concluding discussion

Understanding why university teachers and researchers do not report occurrences of threatening behaviour, expressions of hate and undue influence is a first step towards creating a more secure academic climate. Reporting must be made easier, safer and worthwhile. This requires clear leadership from higher education institutions and the engagement of trade unions. Only then can intimidation be effectively countered and academia be given the conditions it needs to flourish in freedom and security.

The survey shows that threats, hatred and undue influence are part of everyday life for many people working in the higher education sector in Sweden. It is particularly worrying that such a large proportion of those at risk choose not to report incidents when they occur. Behind this silence lie not only individual considerations but also structural problems, such as a lack of confidence in the employer, previous experiences of poor support, a normalised culture of harassment and a fear of negative consequences for people who report incidents.

Reporting rates are not only low, but reporting is too often rewarded with passive responses. Almost a third of those who have actually reported say they received no support or that no action was taken. This leads to the risk of reinforcing a culture in which speaking out is perceived as pointless, or even dangerous. Silence may appear rational, but it is also harmful to both the individual and the organisation.

The data clearly shows that protection against intimidation and influence is not equally applied. People with fixed-term contracts are less likely to report occurrences, which may be due to perceived vulnerability and concerns about the continuation of their employment. This suggests a need for reporting systems that are both accessible and safe for all, regardless of employment status.

If academia is to be a place for the free acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, the people working there need to feel safe to express themselves openly, engage in disagreement and challenge established beliefs. This requires higher education institutions to take clear responsibility for preventing, detecting and managing intimidation and undue influence. Policies and good intentions are not enough. There need to be well-functioning systems, leadership that has the courage to act in difficult situations and a culture where every employee feels that safety and security is taken seriously.

Breaking the culture of silence requires long-term and sustained engagement. But there are also concrete steps that can be taken today. One is to ensure clear and effective reporting channels, where every report leads to concrete measures and relevant support. Another is to raise awareness of the specific risks faced by people in precarious employment and ensure that the same level of protection applies across the whole of academia.

The results of this survey are consistent with those of other surveys, and they therefore reinforce previous findings that incidents are not being reported. It is important that work on these issues continues and that more surveys are conducted to provide an even clearer picture of the problem. This can also lead to the development of more effective measures and interventions, for example depending on the group to which the perpetrator belongs.

Freedom of expression and academic freedom require a secure environment. Taking threats and hatred seriously is therefore not only a health and safety issue, but also a prerequisite for the quality of research and higher education.

Proposals for action

1. **Create clear and safe reporting channels**

All employees should know how and to whom they should report incidents - and be able to do so without fear of negative consequences.

2. **Ensure action is taken**

The employer must provide feedback and take proper action when a complaint is made.

3. **Improve support for victims**

Access to professional support, such as counselling, protective measures or legal advice, should be guaranteed.

4. **Counteract the normalisation of threats, hatred and undue influence**

Include the issue as part of the employer's systematic work environment management and train managers and employees in how to deal with intimidation and undue influence.

Appendix 1: Information about the survey

This report is based on responses to a survey sent to SULF members in spring 2024. 3003 people responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 16 per cent. The results in the report are based on the responses of the 2788 people who indicated that they are members of the research and teaching staff at higher education institutions. The survey included questions about hatred, threats and undue influence, and about the possible consequences of these incidents for the respondent.

The response rate and risk of bias among respondents means that the results should be interpreted with caution. For example, there may be a greater incentive for victims to respond to the survey. However, this problem is less crucial in this report, as the aim is to shed light on why victims do not report incidents.

The report excludes results for groups where fewer than 100 individuals responded to specific questions. Respondents may therefore have provided responses in more categories than shown in Figures 5 and 6. However, responses from these groups are included in charts where results are not broken down by group, for example in Figure 4.

The results of this report can also be seen as a complement to other studies in the same area, such as the Swedish Higher Education Authority's report "Academic freedom in Sweden - government commission on higher education institutions' efforts to promote and protect academic freedom".



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