The establishment of the Sámi University of Applied Sciences (SUAS) in 1989 fulfilled a long-term goal of offering Sámi language teacher education in a Sámi language environment. Three decades later, SUAS has approximately 270 students and offers an array of courses and degrees, varying from traditional Sámi handicrafts to journalism. What makes the institution unique is its language policy: the main language of instruction is Sámi. SUAS is located in Guovdageaidnu, a traditional Sámi town where the majority of the population still uses Sámi language in their everyday life.

The SUAS contributes to revitalizing Sámi languages in three ways. First, the institution has played a vital role in developing an academic Sámi language. The use of Sámi as the primary working language in the SUAS’s research and administration has inspired new vocabulary related to the university setting. Not only is Sámi the main language of the SUAS, but Sámi culture is present throughout the university experience as all education and research is conducted from an Indigenous perspective.

Second, the SUAS developed a special language learning methodology directed toward Sámi who have lost their language and non-Sámi who wish to learn the language. In addition to teaching in the classroom, students learn the language by interacting with holders of traditional Sámi knowledge while fishing, cutting grass for traditional shoes, or visiting reindeer herds.

Finally, the SUAS contributes to Sámi communities by providing strong skillsets for the next generation of Sámi-speaking teachers, journalists, and traditional handicrafts specialists, and offering higher education for fishers and reindeer herders in their Indigenous mother tongue. Students have a chance to participate in exchange programs in cooperation with other Indigenous institutions in the Arctic, creating a circumpolar network of Indigenous experts.