NATIONAL ULF AGREEMENT 2025–2034

National agreement between SUHF[1] and Ifous[2] concerning a partnership on *practice-based research in collaboration.* The agreement is hereinafter referred to as the National ULF[3] Agreement. The overall purpose is to improve teaching and educational activities in the school system[4] through a strengthened scientific foundation.

CONTRACTING PARTNERS

The National ULF Agreement is entered into by SUHF on behalf of higher education institutions offering teacher training (Appendix 1) and Ifous on behalf of school organizers[5].

Higher education institutions with state-funded educational mandates, are responsible for education leading to teacher and preschool teacher qualifications, for postgraduate education, and for the research conducted at the concerned higher education institutions. The three bodies for school organizers coordinate the school organizers within the school system and thereby enable their participation in ULF activities. The school organizers are responsible for the activities and education that take place from preschool to adult education. The higher education institutions and school organizers are responsible for ensuring that their respective educational activities are based on scientific foundation and proven experience.

WHAT THE AGREEMENT REGULATES

The National ULF Agreement focuses on establishing and further developing the processes and structures for collaboration between higher education institutions and school organizers that have been developed and deepened in connection with the government commission for pilot activities with practice-based research (reference number U2015/03572/UH, U2017/01129/UH).

In the National ULF Agreement, the partners agree on the forms of *practice-based research in collaboration* and the use of the state's financial contribution to the activities.

The National ULF Agreement also regulates the conditions for the agreements in the five nodes that complement the National ULF Agreement (hereinafter referred to as the Node ULF Agreements). Each node consists of a group of higher education institutions and school organizers, referred to as: ULF Node North, ULF Node East, ULF Node West, ULF Node

[1] The Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions with authorization from 27 higher education institutions offering teacher training.
[22] Ifous an independent research institute for innovation, research and development in school and preschool, with the authorization of the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKR), Almega Education and the Swedish Association for Independent Non-profit Schools.
[3] ULF denotes Education, Learning, and Research [Utbildning, Lärande och Forskning]
[4] In this National ULF Agreement, the term school system refers to all forms of schooling, educare, and other forms of education in accordance with Chapter 1, Sections 1–2 of the Education Act (2010:800), and the term school organizer refers to the responsible authorities in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, Chapter 2, Sections 2–5.
[5] Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions [Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner], Almega Education [Almega Utbildning], Swedish Association for Independent Non-profit Schools [Idéburna Skolors Riksförbund]

South, and ULF Node Capital Region (see Appendix 1). These are referred to below as the nodes.

DECLARATION OF INTENT BY THE PARTNERS

The partners agree to jointly promote the long-term development of the Swedish school system and the teacher and preschool teacher training through an in-depth collaboration on *practice-based research in collaboration.*

By *practice-based research in collaboration*, the partners refer to research based on the school professions' need for new knowledge in relation to existing research, both nationally and internationally, in order to develop and improve educational activities in the school system and for teacher and preschool teacher training. In this research, professionals from higher education institutions and school organizers collaborate throughout the entire research process, from initiation to implementation and reporting of results. Both researchers and professionals can be employed at a school and/or at a higher education institution. The goal is to gradually build a shared knowledge base that is openly accessible to researchers, professionals and decision-makers at various levels.

It is the partners' conviction that the quality of *practice-based research in collaboration* increases when it is characterized by an equal and complementary approach based on mutual respect, where different knowledge and skills are utilized. Optimal use of the combined resources contributes to strengthening the joint infrastructures. This in turn strengthens the opportunities to increase the participation of professionals in *practice-based research in collaboration.*

The partners agree that *practice-based research in collaboration* requires infrastructures between higher education institutions and school organizers at both the node level and the local level. The partners therefore agree to actively work to ensure that higher education institutions and school organizers jointly establish, develop, and manage such infrastructures.

Against the above background, the partners agree on the following:

COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOL ORGANIZERS AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1§ Collaboration between the partners

The partners shall work to ensure that school organizers and higher education institutions, in addition to their respective core missions, collaborate to create joint structures and processes to identify the school professions' need for new knowledge in relation to current body of research. The partners agree to conduct *practice-based research in collaboration* that contributes to creating mutual added value for both partners' missions by generating, disseminating, and making available new knowledge. The partners shall work to ensure that school organizers and higher education institutions value collaboration as an important part of the competence of researchers and professionals.

The National ULF Agreement regulates the purpose and objectives of the educational activities and the area of application of the funds. The nodes shall contribute to the establishment of local ULF agreements between the higher education institutions and school organizers that collaborate on infrastructures and *practice-based research in collaboration* at the local level, that is, at the higher education institutions level. A higher education institution may sign local ULF agreements with one or more school organizers, and a school organizer can sign local ULF agreements with one or more higher education institutions, regardless of node affiliation.

The National ULF Agreement is based on both state funding and the co-funding of activities by participating higher education institutions and school organizers.

2§ National Steering Committee for ULF

There shall be a national steering committee and a national secretariat for ULF. The National Steering Committee shall consist of 14 members, with an equal number of members from higher education institutions and school organizers. The members from higher education institutions shall be appointed by SUHF. The members from school organizers shall be appointed by Ifous. Representatives from the five nodes shall be included among the members. The role of chair shall alternate annually between a representative of the school organizers and the higher education institutions. Decisions shall be made by consensus. The term of office shall be four years, starting in 2025, with the possibility of re-election. The Steering Committee decides on co-opted members and how the management function is to be organized. The National Steering Committee shall:

- appoint members to the nodes' steering groups (based on proposals from the higher education institutions included in the node and Ifous),
- set overall priorities for the collaboration regulated by this agreement,
- monitor the application of the agreement and, where necessary, issue guidelines for the implementing activities,
- set guidelines for co-financing at node level and local level,
- decide on the design and implementation of recurring follow-ups and evaluations (see §3),
- take initiatives for changes to the agreement based on follow-ups and evaluations,
- develop templates for reporting on the activities, including the use of received and consumed resources (see §15),
- specify conditions for collaboration between nodes,
- regularly collaborate with other actors relevant to the ULF Agreement, and
- work to ensure that results are used and openly shared in a quality-reviewed form locally, nationally, and internationally.

The National ULF Secretariat provides support in the implementation of the National Steering Committee's assignments and ensures, in particular, continuity, documentation, and analysis.

3§ Follow-ups and evaluations

Practice-based research in collaboration shall maintain high scientific quality, be based on the school professions' need for new knowledge in relation to existing research both nationally and internationally in order to develop and improve educational activities in the school system, and for teacher and preschool teacher training, and adhere to good research practice.

The activities carried out within the framework of the National ULF Agreement shall be followed up annually and evaluated every five years. The National Steering Committee for ULF decides how follow-ups and evaluations shall be carried out.

4§ Management group at node level

For collaboration at node level, there shall be a management group for each node. The management group shall include representatives of school organizers and higher education institutions from the nodes, who shall operate on equal terms. The management group shall consist of an equal number of people from higher education institutions and school organizers, with a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 14 members. The role of chair shall alternate annually between a representative of the school organizers and the higher education institutions. Decisions shall be made by consensus. The members are appointed by the National Steering Committee (see §2). The management group shall decide on co-optations and how the management function shall be designed.

The management group is responsible for developing common goals and action plans for how the node will realize the intentions of the National ULF Agreement. The management group decides on how collaboration within the node will be structured. Furthermore, the management group shall make decisions on issues of fundamental common importance.

Each node shall have a coordinating function that contributes to continuity and stability by providing operational and administrative support to the node's management group.

AREAS OF USE OF THE FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION

5§ Areas of use

The state’s grant may be used for costs related to *practice-based research in collaboration*, including the establishment, operation, and development of infrastructures at the node level and local level.

Indirect costs may not be applied to transfers between levels and organizations.

6§ Infrastructure for practice-based research in collaboration

The partners agree that *practice-based research in collaboration* requires infrastructures for collaboration between higher education institutions and school organizers at the node level and local level, i.e. collaboration between individual higher education institutions and school organizers.

The management group in each node decides how the infrastructure should be designed, including which component(s) should be prioritized during which periods (see §§7–8). An infrastructure can consist of one or more of the following components:

- one or more joint research environments where dialogues about *practice-based research in collaboration* take place regularly, and which are led by one or more research leaders with dedicated time and assignment to be responsible for the research environments,
- arenas where initiatives, knowledge, and competence, as well as capacity, can be coordinated, disseminated, and developed between higher education institutions and school organizers, and where meetings take place between professionals, researchers, and teacher students,
- processes, structures, and models for identifying knowledge needs and formulating research questions,
- different forms of employment for lecturers[6] who are employed by either school organizers or higher education institutions, so that they can serve at both institutions,
- targeted efforts to support people with postgraduate education regardless of their employer,
- postgraduate education and direct preparatory postgraduate education in collaboration between higher education institutions and school organizers,
- models for making research accessible to professionals.

7§ Implementation of practice-based research in collaboration

The partners agree that *practice-based research in collaboration* refers to research based on the school professions' need for new knowledge in relation to existing research nationally and internationally and is characterized by researchers and professionals collaborating throughout the entire research process, from initiation to implementation and reporting of results. The complementary approach means that researchers and professionals can take on different roles in different phases of the research process, based on their different interests and skills.

The node's management group decides on the forms for distributing funds for *practice-based research in collaboration*. These forms must be transparent and known, and both higher education institutions and school organizers must be involved in such decisions.

Funds may be used for overhead costs in connection with the implementation and development of research projects and the dissemination of results.

[6] Translator's note: In Sweden, a lecturer can be employed either by a higher education institution or by a school. In the latter case, the lecturer is a certified school teacher with a research degree.

NOD-ULF AGREEMENT

8§ The mission of the ULF nodes

Through collaboration between several higher education institutions and school organizers, the nodes constitute a broad base of knowledge, competence, and capacity for *practice-based research in collaboration*. The nodes shall facilitate cooperation and collaboration in overall initiatives and, as far as possible, enable school organizers to participate in ULF activities regardless of organizational form or other conditions. This includes, among other things, that the nodes shall provide information about the supporting infrastructure available in the node, facilitate participation in meeting places and research environments, and clarify the conditions for participation in research projects. The nodes shall ensure that the activities are open to participation in *practice-based research in collaboration* with higher education institutions and school organizers throughout the country.

The Node ULF Agreements shall contain a specification of the overall goals in the National ULF Agreement, stating how these shall be handled in the node during the agreement period. Furthermore, the following conditions shall be regulated:

- the working methods of the management group (see §4),
- the forms of collaboration with other nodes,
- the assignments of the coordinating function (see §§1,4),
- the forms of co-financing (see §2),
- action plans for how the node shall realize the intentions of the National ULF Agreement
- the forms for how decisions on the distribution of funds to infrastructure and research within the node shall be made (see §§5–7, 12),
- how results are shared, disseminated, and made available.

The nodes shall report annually on the node's activities to the National Steering Committee and carry out follow-ups and evaluations in accordance with decisions of the National Steering Committee (see §2, §15). The nodes may also develop templates for local ULF agreements and/or agreements relating to specific research projects. The management group is free to raise other issues if the management group agrees. The management group or an individual member may, if necessary, raise issues with the national steering group.

RESOURCE ALLOCATION, PAYMENT AND REPORTING OF FUNDS

9§ State compensation for ULF activities

The state's compensation for ULF activities is specified in the Swedish Parliament's [Riksdagens] decision on the research and innovation bill and budget bills.

10§ Model for resource allocation to the nodes

The National Steering Committee decides on the allocation of available funds to the five nodes. After shared provisions for costs at the national level, the funds are distributed equally between the nodes.

11§ Payment of ULF funds

ULF funds are paid by the state to a coordinating university in each node after a decision by the National Steering Committee. The National Steering Committee may develop other forms of payment during the agreement period.

12§ Distribution of ULF funds at node level

It is the responsibility of each node to decide, in its management group, on the distribution of funds for *practice-based research in collaboration* between different parts of the infrastructure and project funds.

Redistribution of ULF funds between the nodes may take place and be regulated in each individual case in agreements between the nodes concerned. In the event of disagreement, the issue is referred to the National Steering Committee for a decision.

13§ Co-financing

Higher education institutions and school organizers shall co-finance the activities. Guidelines shall be drawn up by the National Steering Committee and reported annually as determined by the National Steering Committee (§2).

14§ Reporting of funds in accordance with this agreement

The National Steering Committee for ULF shall, based on a common reporting template, report a comprehensive picture of resources used to the state. The report is completed collectively by each node to the National Steering Committee.

15§ Termination of agreement

This agreement shall terminate at the end of the calendar year occurring three years after either partner has given written notice of termination of the agreement.

16§ Validity of the agreement

1 January 2025 to 31 December 2034

Stockholm 2024-12-20

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Hans Adolfsson (Chair SUHF[7])	Markus Lindgren (Chair Ifous)

[7]Hans Adolfsson, as chairman of SUHF, has received authorization from all higher education institutions offering teacher training to sign the agreement.

Appendix 1

The five nodes that supplement the National ULF Agreement consist of higher education institutions and school organizers referred to as: ULF Node North, ULF Node East, ULF Node West, ULF Node South and ULF Node Capital Region. Members of the node's management group are appointed by the National Steering Committee (see §2). The higher education institutions included in each node are listed below. School organizers are initially assigned to the node corresponding to the higher education institution with which they regularly collaborate.

ULF Node NORTH: Dalarna University, University of Gävle, Luleå University of Technology, Mid Sweden University, Umeå University

ULF Node WEST: Chalmers University of Technology, University of Gothenburg, University of Borås, Jönköping University, University West, Karlstad University

ULF Node SOUTH: Halmstad University, Kristianstad University, Linnaeus University, Lund University, Malmö University

Ulf Node EAST: Linköping University, Mälardalen University, Uppsala University, Örebro University

Ulf Node CAPITAL REGION: Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences, Konstfack – University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Royal College of Music in Stockholm, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm University of the Arts, Stockholm University, Södertörn University