



Questions about Early years

Scouts for four and five year olds

How did the Board of Trustees make their decision about early years?

They reviewed analysis of the pilots by external experts (the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC)), as well as our experience from Northern Ireland and member consultation. This showed that around three quarters of members support the idea of early years Scouts. You can find all of the research that helped them make their decision on our website.

What are we actually doing now and why?

Planning. At the moment, we're focussing on safety and COVID-19. Now isn't the time to launch a new section. Instead, we're going to use the time for detailed planning and preparation, so that we can get the launch spot on when the time is right. We'll communicate with County/Area/Region (Scotland) Commissioners about the planning process, so you can relax for now – even if you're super keen, you don't need to do anything just yet. For now, no one can start Scouts for four and five year olds (even virtually) before we can settle on a national launch date that takes into account any remaining challenges related to COVID-19. This is really important, as unofficial provision is against our rules and cannot be insured.

Will the nations be rolling out Scouts for four and five year olds too?

Scouts Scotland and Scouts Cymru Boards will consider the UK Board's decision and its implications for Scotland and Wales in the coming months. The Board of Scouts Northern Ireland already supports providing early years Scouts within The Scouts Association, so we'll be working with them to see how best to manage the existing Squirrels provision going forward.

Will all groups have to offer this new section?

No. It's 100% opt-in. There won't be any pressure, deadlines or requirements for groups to offer the new provision; it's entirely your decision.

What support will be provided for Districts to plan for this?

We want to make sure that groups and Districts are well supported in their decision-making, planning and delivery, so we're preparing resources (and an exciting, cohort approach) to help. However, this will only be

available once a launch date has been decided at some point in the future, taking into account the lingering challenges related to COVID-19.

What's the new section going to be called?

We're making final legal checks on the name and will update members when the outcome is clear.

How will the national resources and support for the new section be funded?

We've funded all of the piloting and resource development costs through fundraising. So far, it hasn't cost the organisation anything, and we're confident that we'll secure more external funding for this for a number of years to come.

What'll happen to the pilots currently operating as Hedgehogs?

The pilots will continue to operate under that name, until we're ready to launch the new section. We will support them, as well as existing provision in Northern Ireland, to undertake the new programme once we're ready to do so.

Will you be creating more pilots?

Yes. We still have a number of opportunities to explore in London, funded by the Mercers Company. We also want to pilot early years provision in a couple of Districts, so that we can understand what impact this has on volunteer line managers. We've already agreed with local volunteers where this'll be happening, so there's no need to apply.

What do existing Squirrel Dreys in Northern Ireland need to do?

Nothing. It'll take time to sort out how we work alongside existing early years provision in Northern Ireland, so for now, carry on as you are. The Northern Ireland Squirrel Association will continue to support you.

What does the new brand and uniform look like?

We haven't started work on this yet, as it's still very early days.

-

If you have any further questions, please check out the [early years project page](#), where you can find our research, blogs and webinars. These contain more in-depth detail.

scouts.org.uk/early-years