

Purpose	FOR APPROVAL
Paper	Nights Away for Squirrel Scouts
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The youngest section in UK Scouting 'Squirrel Scouts' officially launched in September 2021. The launch Programme did not include the option to deliver nights away activity as this needed the finalisation of piloting that had been delayed by COVID-19, to be able to make an informed decision in terms of safety, safeguarding and programme quality.

Since September 2021, eight pilot nights away events were undertaken, using a range of delivery models, involving 70 children, 50 adult volunteers and 20 Young Leaders. The aims of the pilots were to test a **variety of models**, suitability for **young people and adult volunteers**, suitability of existing nights away **guidance** for this age group, and ensure nights away could be age appropriate and **developmental**.

Learning concluded that all **formats** of nights away are appropriate, suitable for **young people and adult volunteers** and had a **positive impact** on Squirrels. However some additional/bespoke **guidance** would still be helpful, some adult volunteers (although positive) **remained nervous** and the question raised by Northern Ireland colleagues of how to maintain a **progressive programme** from Squirrels to Beavers if nights away happens in Squirrels should be respected.

Recommendations

The Safety and Safeguarding Committee, and Strategy & Delivery Committee (Scheme of Delegation) are invited to APPROVE overnight stays as part of the Squirrels programme on an opt-in basis rather than being required as a minimum standard.

1. Context

The new section for four and five year olds 'Squirrel Scouts' was approved by the Board for full implementation from September 2021. The approval to proceed in rolling out this new section was done on the proviso that nights away activities were excluded until a small number of pilots took place. This was on the basis of understanding any implications for safety, safeguarding or the quality/progressiveness of the programme (noting that Squirrels in Northern Ireland has historically not undertaken nights away events – not because it was not possible, but to save this experience for Beaver Scouts).

2. The Pilots

2.1. *Objective – What we want to achieve*

The Nights Away Pilots will aim to:

- Test a variety of nights away delivery models;
- Explore the suitability of nights away for both leaders and Squirrels aged young people;
- Assess the suitability of current advice and guidance for this age group and make recommendations where additional advice/guidance should be implemented;
- Ensure nights away are age appropriate and are beneficial to the development of the young people attending.

2.2. *Testing – What we did*

A total of 8 pilots were completed through the period September 2021 – May 2022, involving 72 young people, 51 adult leaders and 18 young leaders. The delivery models tested were:

- 3x Squirrels only, one night, indoors
- 1x Squirrels and Beavers, one night, indoors
- 1x District camp with whole Group, one night, under canvas
- 1x Entire Group camp with Squirrels, two nights, indoors
- 1x Squirrels and Beavers, two night, indoors
- 1x Family camp, one night, indoors
- All of the pilots were attended by one of the Early Years team
- All plans, risk assessments and Nights Away Notification (NAN) forms were approved by the National Safety Manager (Movement) before Dreys were given approval
- All adults were asked to complete both pre and post residential feedback forms reflecting on their confidence, knowledge and skills in relation to running a Squirrels night away
- Towards the end of each pilot an activity was facilitated with the young people in order to record their experiences and reflections of the overnight residential experience
- Focus groups with each Drey were facilitated by a staff member post each pilot to gather further learning and reflections

3. Learning

3.1. Delivery Models

All of the delivery models tested were successful, with no concerns raised regarding equipment in the venues or the sites suitability for the age of the young people. Specifically:

- **Indoors at regular meeting place:** Successful. Young people were familiar with their surroundings and knew where the facilities were.
- **Indoors away from regular meeting place:** Successful. The adults gave the young people a tour of the venue on arrival and the young people managed the stay well.
- **Group camps:** Successful. Young people engaged with the different sections and appropriate age activities were provided throughout. This model was particularly conducive to team building and developing social skills.
- **More than one night away:** Successful. There were some late nights which may have resulted in some tired Squirrels once they returned home. However, feedback from parents/carers suggested that while they were tired the evening of their return, they recovered quickly.
- **Under Canvas:** Successful. Three out of the 15 young people who took part in this format woke in the night, two settled themselves and the third went back to sleep after reassurance from the leader. As this was also a district camp there were over 580 young people involved of varying ages which didn't faze the Squirrels. They interacted confidently with the older sections and were able to take part in the more adventurous activities such as climbing and bus caving.

3.2. Suitability for young people

Pre-residential questionnaires completed by the volunteers who hosted the nights away pilots raised a number of concerns about young people:

- becoming over-tired during the event,
- getting upset due to being away from parents/carers during the night,
- getting bored with the activities
- bedwetting/toileting issues.

The post-residential questionnaires and focus groups didn't highlight any of these concerns.

'Previous experience with Beaver sleepover they were very anxious about sleeping and thought this might be more apparent for Squirrels. Also thought more night wetting might be an issue especially with Covid and the delays in development.'

Adult volunteer leading a one night Squirrels only indoor pilot

'All the things I would have been worried about are fine, I think they have done better than beavers'

Adult volunteer leading a one night family indoor pilot

'Really successful and the kids really enjoyed themselves. Every moment you could see the joy in what they were doing.'

Adult volunteer leading a one night Squirrels only indoor pilot

'I would just like to add what a wonderful opportunity this camp was for a children who would not normally be included and it has made my son beam with pride and he thinks they should do three nights next time'

Parent/carer of child on a two night group indoor pilot

Specific learning that was identified:

- There were only two **bedwetting** incidents during the 8 nights away activity pilots, where children became upset during the under canvas experience they were settled back to sleep quickly, no children went home before the end of any of the events. Leaders reported feeling more confident of their own skills and were excited about the prospect of future nights away events for the Squirrels. A small number of young people wore night time pull ups
- Reflective activities were carried out with the young people throughout the pilots. Negative feedback focussed on individual activities at the nights away event and not the nights away experience. Highlights for the young people included sleeping over in tents (indoors and under canvas) and participating in a range of activities such as crate stacking and archery.
- There were some logistical issues in the early pilots in relation to **changing at bedtimes**. One group found that when the young people were asked to change into their pyjamas it caused a little confusion and some young people were wandering around whilst getting changed. The group rectified this the following morning and asked the young people to change in their own tents and ensure their belongings were returned to their bags. This did not cause any safeguarding issues but was more concerning for lost equipment.
- **Meal times took longer** than some groups had anticipated, the dexterity with a knife and fork ranged quite drastically throughout the pilots.
- Where **programmes allowed for 'down time'** the young people were able to engage in the child initiated play that is really important for this age group. This was particularly important in the 2 groups that ran the 2 night

experiences. The young people were able to interact with their peers in a relaxed way which supported the development of their personal and social interactions.

- Where **medication and/or first aid** was required the group followed their policies and it was administered efficiently and effectively. Across the 8 pilots first aid was required for a young leader who cut their finger whilst whittling. Young people taking part in the pilots did trip occasionally, as is expected with this age range due to the continuing development of their fine and gross motor skills, however they did not injure themselves and so didn't require any first aid.

'It was kind of fun'

Child on a two night group indoor pilot

'My favourite was crate stacking, I got to the top!'

Child on a two night indoor pilot

3.3. Suitability for adult volunteers

The majority of leaders were well equipped and planned appropriate sessions.

- This was evident with leaders who had **previous experience** of nights away with different sections
- Newer leaders enjoyed the experience but felt that some additional support would be required if nights away was to become part of the Squirrels programme.
- Risk assessments were completed to a good standard with some guidance on presentation and nuanced suggestions for the age group suggested, accepting that there was some additional support provided by HQ regarding COVID measures for the earlier pilots.

'The skills needed are transferrable just need to be used in a way that meets 4/5 year olds needs'

Adult volunteer leading on one night indoor pilot

'Still unsure what to do in different situations or bigger groups, need some training on this'.

Adult volunteer leading on one night joint Beavers and Squirrels indoor pilot

3.4. Age appropriate and beneficial to the young persons development

The pilots clearly demonstrated that residential are a powerful format for delivering against our Theory of Change within a high quality programme:

- The Group residential created the opportunity for building strong groups and **team building**.
- The overnight stays, particularly the two night stays, provided the young people with the opportunity to develop **perseverance** and the progression in the young peoples abilities was evident.
- We witnessed young people **learning a new skill and then teaching another young person**. This was evidenced on numerous occasions including a Squirrel learning how to use the rope swing and then teaching her big sister who was a Cub.
- It was suggested that **further support with games** and activities would be useful.
- **Parents/carers** suggested that attending a night away experience had impacted positively on their young persons development.
- Equally, **adult volunteers** said reported that young people who attended the nights away events were more confident and settled **during their regular meeting sessions** following the experience. Young people who were shy, quiet and not confident enough to speak to leaders before the nights away event became confident in their role as a Squirrel, asking questions and engaging more positively in the regular Squirrels sessions.

'My little girl attended her first camp with squirrels 2nd Howden for two nights. I just want to say what a brilliant experience she had.'

Parent/carer of child on two night group indoor pilot

'She didn't just cope but excelled and is continuing to build life skills/communication and social skills'

Parent/carer of child on two night group indoor pilot

'Before the camp, he wouldn't speak to me, only held onto the young leaders hand for the whole meeting. Now he's taking part and having a great time.'

Adult volunteer leading on two night indoor pilot

4. Recommendation

Following on from the evidence gathered throughout the pilot period and after endorsement from the National Safety Manager (Movement), it is believed that nights away could play a powerful part of a quality programme for 4-6 year olds.

However, accepting feedback that there remained some nervousness and asks for additional advice and support following pilots (particularly in the context of 45% of Squirrel adult volunteers having no previous Scouting experience) and to allow for

local decisions on whether nights away is better in Squirrels or Beavers, it is not proposed that nights away be a minimum standard for the section (as it is for all other sections).

Hence we are inviting relevant committees/stakeholders to approve that **overnight stays are included as part of the Squirrels programme on an opt-in basis rather than being required as a minimum standard**. This distinction is important as all other sections are obliged to deliver nights away as part of a quality programme within Policy, Organisation and Rules (POR). This would require a slight amendment to POR 3.7, point h) to read *"Squirrels are able to take part in overnight stays however they are not required as a minimum standard for the section."*

Light touch guidance would be developed to support leaders in the preparation and delivery of overnight stays with younger members, which would sit within the general nights away support information on [scouts.org.uk](https://www.scouts.org.uk).

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