

SCIENCE MUSEUM

EARLY BIRDS AND NIGHT OWLS

2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE LORD
LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE WOLFSON
FOUNDATION

FOREWORD



I have been involved with Early Birds since our first pilot event in 2014 and, over the past six years, I have been fortunate enough to see the programme grow. I am incredibly proud that we are able to offer this opportunity for families who wouldn't otherwise visit the Science Museum.

From its beginning, the essential formula for Early Birds has remained the same: creating a safe space for visitors that need a calmer, quieter environment. However, as the programme has developed, we have continued to adapt our offer to the needs of our visitors. In response to their feedback, we have made practical changes that have made it easier for families to extend their visit to the Museum, as well as continuing to provide bespoke tailored talks and activities that they might have difficulty engaging with during normal opening hours.

I am very grateful to the Foundation for working with us to broaden the reach of the programme, enabling us to describe the environment rather than describing the types of people that we welcome. This has enabled visitors with other sensory needs to benefit from the warmth of Early Birds.

We would not have been able to achieve any of this without the Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation. I hope you enjoy this latest update and we look forward to keeping you informed about how the programme develops over the coming years. On behalf of our visitors, thank you for your continued support.

Sevinc Kisacik,
Events
Producer,
Early Birds and
Night Owls

2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE WOLFSON FOUNDATION

Since 2014, The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation has generously supported Early Birds at the Science Museum. Over the past five years, Early Birds and Night Owls events have become some of the most valued by our visitors and, often, those who attend would otherwise not be able to come to the Museum.

This report outlines the programme's activity over the year 2019/20 and plans for the year to come.



EVENTS AND ATTENDANCE

During the past year, we have held five Early Birds events and one Night Owls event:

- 17th March 2019 **The Sun** Early Birds: 343 attendees
- 4th May 2019 **Space** Early Birds: 297 attendees
- 6th July 2019 **Night Owls**: 92 attendees
- 5th October 2019 **Space** Early Birds: 363 attendees
- 23rd November 2019 **Top Secret** Early Birds (evening): 395 attendees
- 14th December 2019 **Top Secret** Early Birds: 176 attendees

Our final Early Birds event of this season is scheduled to take place on 1st March 2020.

Visitor numbers remained high in 2019/20, with events regularly fully booked. In response to visitor feedback, we trialed our first evening Early Birds in November, which was the most well attended Early Birds event of the season. We think that the 14th December Early Birds wasn't as well attended as others because of weather and proximity to the holidays.

NEWS FROM EARLY BIRDS

- In response to feedback from visitors who found it difficult to come to the Museum early in the morning, we trialed a version of Early Birds that took place in the evening. The event took place between 18:30 and 19:45 and was hugely successful, receiving the highest number of visitors at an Early Birds to date. We have scheduled another evening Early Birds in 2020/21.
- We continue to be approached by other museums who are looking to make their organisations more accessible for visitors who need a quieter environment. In 2019/20, we have shared learnings with:
 - Museo Della Scienza E Della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci (Milan)
 - Tower Bridge and the Monument
 - British Museum
 - London Wetlands Centre
 - Royal Academy of Arts
- Early Birds began to host a drop-in workshop activity run by [Engine Shed](#) that allowed children to work together as a team to construct train tracks and build a new world. We found that this activity was a good way to encourage more inhibited children to speak to one another.
- Some visitors have fed back that their children would rather staff didn't engage with them while they are at Early Birds. We will be developing communication aids, potentially lanyards, to signal this to event staff.

NEWS FROM NIGHT OWLS

- We reviewed the Night Owls programme, following a conclusion that we had been over-programming for these events. We have decided to run two scaled back Night Owls events across the year instead of one larger event, offering more availability for visitors through the year, and a more general offer of access to the Museum with a few programmed activities. We continue to be the only London cultural institution offering a tailored event for visitors aged 16 and above with autism spectrum conditions and sensory processing differences.
- We began working with [Ambitious about Autism](#), the national charity for children and young people with autism. During Night Owls, six young people and two supervisors from the charity volunteered to assist with the event and were based in galleries that most suited their interests or skills. Each young person was paired with a member of Science Museum staff to offer assistance through the evening. This initiative was a step forward for making Night Owls feel more of an accessible, safe space.
- [Changing the Face of Autism Research Together](#) showcased their project at Night Owls. This project encouraged participants to produce self-portraits and consider perceptions of people with autism. The aim of the project is to establish a dialogue between researchers and the autistic community so that future studies on autism are influenced by the views, priorities and input of autistic people. After coming to Early Birds, the project was also showcased at one of our monthly [Lates](#) events.

EARLY BIRDS VISITOR INSIGHTS

April 2019 marked the completion of audience research which has given us a clear picture of how our Early Birds visitors engage with the programme, what they appreciate the most, and how we can improve. The views of 251 visitors are represented in the following findings.

Encouragingly, the research concluded that Early Birds is largely very successful. Families we spoke to felt included, welcome and comfortable in a crowd-free, friendly museum environment. Parents spoke very highly of Science Museum Staff, whom they found understanding, enthusiastic and able to judge when to interact with their children and when to step back. Visitors appreciated the free entry to Wonderlab, and extra activities and features tailored to an Early Birds audience.

Families mainly attended with children aged between 4 and 10 years old, with most groups visiting with two accompanying adults. Fewer groups included children aged between 11 and 15. Most children who attended were on the autism spectrum, while some identified as having other sensory processing differences. Parents were very appreciative of the fact that siblings without additional needs were welcome at Early Birds. They said that this helped them have a shared, family experience which they wouldn't otherwise be able to have.

Most families found out about Early Birds through word-of-mouth and through autism or disability networks.

Visitors identified areas for improvement as:

- Clearer information on cafés and event locations.
- Ensure that the description on the website specifically mentions that the event is suitable for children with an autism spectrum condition or sensory needs, using vocabulary that parents use to describe their children's needs.

This feedback will enable us to make valuable improvements going forward.



VISITOR FEEDBACK

"It was really fantastic, my son really enjoyed it and wants to come again soon. Every one of the staff at the event were friendly and very helpful. [...] The fact it was an evening was really great, I live outside of London and coming for 8am to the events is quite tricky so it made it possible for us to come. I really hope we can come again soon."

A parent after visiting the first evening Early Birds.

"I just wanted to say thank you again for including our young people in Night Owls. They all had such wonderful evenings and have all emailed/text me saying how much fun they had. Charlotte's mum emailed to say Charlotte had never been in such a supportive environment."

Ambitious About Autism Supervisor after visiting Night Owls with a group of young people.

"It's really nice to be in the same space as other families with children who find public events challenging and the staff are always so helpful and attentive and the activities are engaging. No way could my son access these activities without the adjustments you make. This event gives him opportunities like other children his age. Thank you!"

A parent after visiting Early Birds.

"I've struggled with the sheer noise of museums all my life but last night was like having the museum all to yourself, I felt like a child hungry for learning."

A Night Owls visitor.

HOW WAS YOUR OVERALL VISIT?

Please circle

1
Poor

2

3

4

5
Excellent

COMMENTS

We were here for Early Birds Thank you very much for running these sessions. They are invaluable

Amazing for my son to have a safe place to be himself.

Thank you.

It is thanks to you that the Museum has been able to create a sensory friendly environment to access and enjoy science.

Together, we will continue to inspire the innovators of the future.

Thank you

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