

SCIENCE MUSEUM

EARLY BIRDS AND NIGHT OWLS

2023/24 ANNUAL REPORT TO
THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE
WOLFSON FOUNDATION



AN UPDATE REPORT PRESENTED TO THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE WOLFSON FOUNDATION FEBRUARY 2024

OVERVIEW

Early Birds is a sensory-friendly event organised regularly by the Science Museum. It is designed for individuals who need a quieter environment to enjoy the museum, since the busy hours with the general public can be overwhelming. Those with autism spectrum conditions or with sensory processing differences can benefit from adjustments.

The event is free of charge and suitable for families with children aged 4-15. It takes place throughout the year, before or after the museum's regular opening hours. **Early Birds** visitors have exclusive access to the museum and can enjoy exploring its galleries as well as participating in a selection of fun workshops. There are also designated quiet areas available for those who need to take a break.

Night Owls is the age 16+ version of this sensory-friendly event, open to family and friends to attend. Taking place on selected dates throughout the year, **Night Owls** happens exclusively after hours.

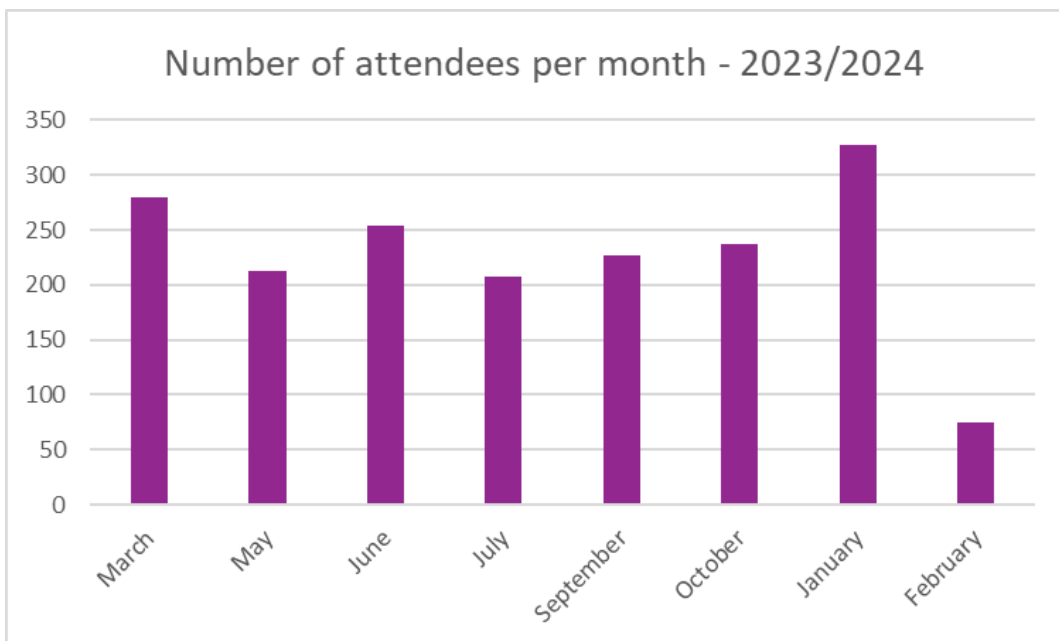
Visitors are welcome to explore our galleries and enjoy a range of fun activities across the museum during the event. We adjust our operations and lower the volume on our exhibits wherever possible.

The **Science Museum** aims to inspire visitors through award-winning exhibitions, iconic objects, and stories of incredible scientific achievement. Tracing its origins from the Great Exhibition of 1851, the museum has pioneered interactive science interpretation for more than eight decades and is the most visited museum in the UK by school groups.

YOUR SUPPORT

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Trustees of The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation for their support towards **Early Birds** and **Night Owls** since 2014. Your generous contributions over a decade have played a crucial role in enabling these cherished events to accommodate the sensory needs of several families.

EVENTS AND ATTENDANCE



Above: Visitor attendance figures per month over the year.

INSIGHTS AND UPDATES

We are delighted to report that we had a total of 1,819 visitors who attended our eight Early Birds and Night Owls events through the year. Compared to last year, our attendance figures increased by approximately 20%, indicating the growing demand for these events. Additionally, our visitor numbers were more consistent at each event, ensuring that our attendees had a better experience overall.

Thanks to the generous support from The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation, we were able to offer discounted tickets to more of our temporary exhibitions and ticketed galleries, which helped to remove a significant barrier to attendance. Consequently, we had over 700 visitors to Science Fiction, Power Up, Turn It Up, and Wonderlab exhibitions. Moving forward, our objective is to offer at least two of these options to visitors.

In May 2023, we hosted a Night Owls which turned out to be a great success, having twice as many attendees as compared to our previous events. The Science Fiction theme played a major role in attracting more visitors. We are committed to learning from this experience and implementing more themed evenings in our future Night Owls events.

We have also added an Early Birds Evening as a summer event in July, which turned out to be more popular than other times of the year. We are planning to continue this event in the future whenever the programme allows.

Event Date	Event Type	Attendees	Exhibitions Tickets
18 March 2023	Early Birds Morning	280	70*
27 May 2023	Night Owls	212	49*
24 June 2023	Early Birds Morning	254	124
22 July 2023	Early Birds Evening	207	94
23 September 2023	Early Birds Morning	227	142
28 October 2023	Early Birds Morning	237	100
27 January 2024	Early Birds Morning	327	222
10 February 2024	Night Owls	75	31
TOTAL	8	1819	832

Above: A breakdown of visitor attendance by event

*Due to changes in ticketing, these numbers do not include Wonderlab attendance



Adhering to the principle of ensuring that museum visitors can participate in as much programming as possible, we aim to open at least two ticketed exhibitions or galleries at each Early Birds/Night Owls session, with the necessary adjustments. Although this requires more staff, it provides visitors with an opportunity to view something that may otherwise be inaccessible.

Additionally, we incorporate activities from other museum programmes, such as Lates. The Science Museum Lates are popular after-hours events for adults, commonly very loud and crowded, making it difficult for neurodivergent individuals to attend. We have taken one-off activities from these events and made them available to Night Owls attendees, allowing them to experience these pieces of programming.

We have also recently expanded our output of accessible event newsletters, providing visitors with more information on booking ahead of the event, and allowing them more time to plan their attendance.

In order to make challenging parts of the museum more accessible, we have been experimenting with new approaches.

For instance, the *Turn It Up* exhibition was known to be louder than most because of its focus on music. To address this, we made sensory objects available to visitors at the entrance that they could take with them. This idea was implemented in collaboration with the Science and Industry Museum, who received excellent feedback for this approach.

Early Birds is one of the most sought-after events for staff to work on, and we always receive more applications than we need. The atmosphere we create during the event is a pleasure for the staff to be involved in, and many have mentioned how working on Early Birds has boosted their confidence in supporting neurodivergent visitors during other times.

LOOKING FORWARD

The Science Museum Group recently conducted a review of provisions for neurodivergent audiences. Among the top-rated outputs in this category was Early Birds. The review is expected to help in providing further training to staff, which many people believe would allow the event to progress to the next level.

The Early Birds team intend to use the program as a starting point to enhance the level of training given to museum staff across all teams that interact with visitors, regarding the requirements of neurodivergent visitors.

An increasing number of artists, writers, and other professionals have shown interest in working with Early Birds. To facilitate this, we are planning to organise a series of workshops as part of Early Birds and Night Owls. These workshops will provide visitors with the opportunity to delve into the event's themes in more detail if they wish to do so. We have had successful collaborations with other events, such as adapting activities from Lates. With this in mind, we are looking to work with external speakers to create more opportunities for them to engage with new audiences.

The schedule of museum events is becoming increasingly busy. Fortunately, Early Birds is considered a core part of the museum's commitment to being open for all, and all museum teams are willing to ensure that the events can take place on suitable dates.



We work closely with other event teams to ensure that Early Birds' schedules are not interrupted by other necessary work. Looking forward, we will continue to prioritise Early Birds when organising the museum's programme.

FEEDBACK

We are delighted to share with you a selection of visitor feedback quotes which we hope will help to demonstrate the impact of your generosity:

"I wanted to say a huge thank you to the staff at the museum for putting on the Early Birds event last weekend. My two children are both autistic and my daughter in particular has very complex needs and usually would not be able to manage visiting somewhere like a museum. However, because of the early opening, which meant a quieter journey, the ability to park nearby, the quieter museum and reduced sensory stimulus, she was able to engage in very fun and educational visit. I am so grateful to everyone involved in putting on such an inclusive event!"

"I just wanted to say thanks for having the event yesterday, which I attended from Oxford (handily parking in blue badge space right outside) with my 20-year old daughter and 17-year old son - who never want to do stuff together - as we are all autistic/ADHD. It felt incredibly special to be in the museum after hours and the quiet and low lights were lovely. We had an amazing time exploring the main museum and were blown away by the Power Up exhibition, which is the main reason I took my son (he's doing gaming at college but otherwise never leaves the house). For a couple of hours we got to relax, enjoy ourselves and have fun. The staff were all really lovely and helpful. I'm definitely going to look out for similar events in future. [...] Thanks again for holding this event - it makes such a tremendous difference to have things like this available."

"I wanted to thank the museum for doing these sessions for our SEN kids. I can't tell you what it means to us parents to have these offered. My daughter is Autistic and really struggles with noise and crowds. She also cannot stand or walk for too long as she suffers from severe joint pain which is also linked to her Autism. She is passionate about Aviation and hopes to work in airline safety or for Air Traffic Control one day. Being able to visit the museum during Early Birds when it is quiet is her absolute joy. We all had such a lovely morning together. So many people write our kids off just because their brains have some different connections. But some of the greatest minds in history were neurodiverse. So thank you for including our kids in your museum events and enabling them to explore their passions to the max. We look forward to visiting again soon."

[@sciencemuseum](#) Thank you so much for putting on the SEN session this morning for autistic children. My daughter and I had a great time

12:05 PM · Jan 27, 2024 · 8 Views



SCIENCE MUSEUM

Early Birds and Night Owls are among of our most beloved programmes at the Science Museum. Visitors and museum staff alike are grateful to have the opportunity to create and enjoy such a wonderfully welcoming environment.

We are thankful for your continuing support towards these events, which enable even more people to discover the wonder of science at our museum without worrying about the crowds or noise levels.

Once again, thank you ever so much and we look forward to keeping you updated with our progress.