

**SCIENCE
MUSEUM**

**EARLY BIRDS AND
NIGHT OWLS**

2024/25 ANNUAL REPORT FOR
THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE
WOLFSON FOUNDATION



AN UPDATE REPORT PRESENTED TO THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE WOLFSON FOUNDATION MARCH 2025

OVERVIEW

Early Birds is a sensory-friendly event organised by the Science Museum which has now been running for over 10 years. Designed for individuals who prefer not to visit the museum with the general public when the experience can be too overwhelming, it enables those with autism spectrum conditions or sensory processing differences, for example, to enjoy the museum in a quieter environment.

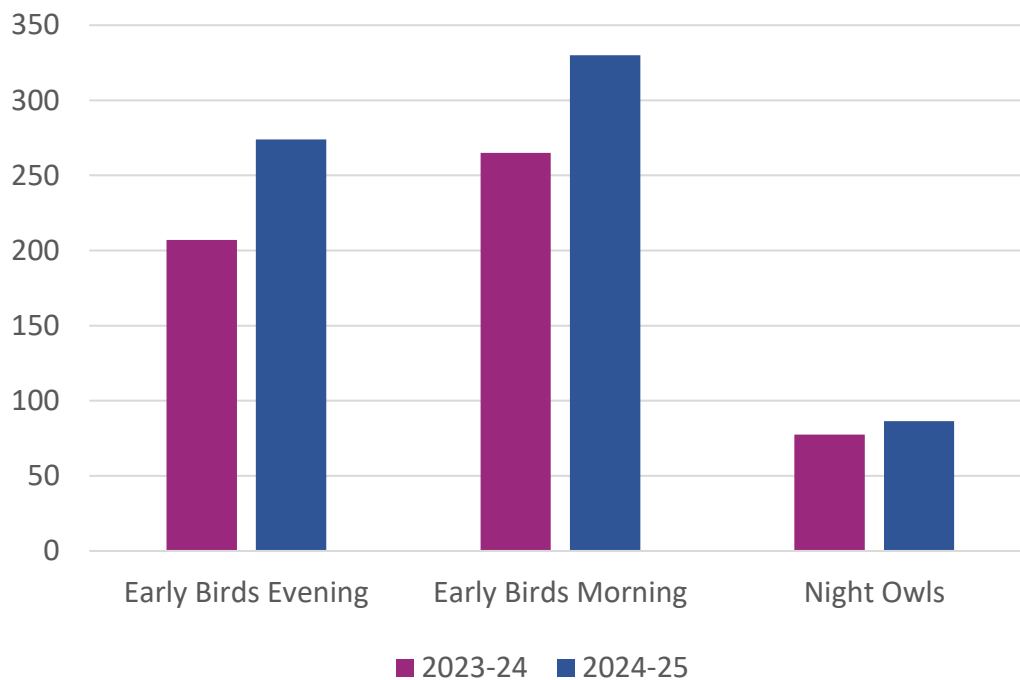
These sessions, suitable for families with children aged 4-15, are free of charge and take place regularly throughout the year, before or after the museum's regular opening hours. Early Birds visitors enjoy exclusive access to the galleries as well as a variety of fun workshops, and there are also designated quiet areas available for those needing to take a break.

Night Owls is the version of these sessions for individuals aged 16+, which take place exclusively after hours on selected dates throughout the year.

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.

EVENTS AND ATTENDANCE



Average attendee figures for each type of session

INSIGHTS AND UPDATES

Early Birds remains one of the most popular events for our accessible audience, and we were delighted to welcome 2,041 visitors across 8 Early Birds and Night Owls sessions over the past year. Compared to the previous year, our attendance figures have increased by approximately 12%, indicating the growing demand for these events.

The most popular sessions took place at the end of the school Easter holidays and beginning of the school summer holidays, demonstrating that these are key periods in which our audiences are looking for accessible activities, and so this is something we will look to continue as we schedule sessions for the forthcoming year.

From September to January, there were a higher number of visitors who had never previously attended. This is likely to be due to the external partnerships with whom we collaborated which increased our exposure. We will continue to build on the success of these collaborations by exploring further potential partnerships from existing relationships within the museum's Public Programme team.

‘Such a wonderful evening for my neurodiverse kids – they got so much from it’

Event Date	Event Type	Attendees
13 April 2024	Early Birds Morning	362
25 May 2024	Night Owls	71
20 July 2024	Early Birds Evening	331
14 September 2024	Early Birds Morning	306
23 December 2024	Night Owls	102
11 January 2025	Early Birds Morning	292
15 February 2025	Early Birds Evening	217
22 March 2025	Early Birds Morning	360
TOTAL	8	2,041

NEW PARTNERSHIPS



'A well-worth-it event. Not only was joining you a lot of fun, but we received a heartfelt email of thanks from one of the families who came to talk to us'

DR BRIAN IRVINE,
UCL Centre for Research in Autism
and Education

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN AUTISM AND EDUCATION

For the Night Owls session in May 2024, we welcomed scientists and researchers from UCL Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), a team of autistic and non-autistic researchers pioneering participatory research to enhance the lives of autistic people.

During their session with Night Owl visitors, they explained the type of research they are carrying out in relation to autism and education, and invited visitors to participate in some of their computer based, interactive experiments looking into perceptual capacities which sparked much conversation on the latest findings in autism. It is worth noting that they were invited to talk through the work they are doing within the autism community, but were specifically researching Night Owls visitors.

FLAMINGO CHICKS

For the Early Birds morning session in September 2024, we collaborated with Flamingo Chicks, a dance community which brings joy, wellbeing, and change to disabled children and their families through inclusive dance and active learning.

During their session at the Science Museum, the Flamingo Chicks team took inspiration from the objects within the Mathematics gallery to curate an interactive workshop.

Visitors were encouraged to use movements inspired by the Handley Page aircraft that is a feature of the gallery. Children used fabrics to mimic wind flow, made different sounds and did small dances/body movements that represented the patterns of the plane.

This session was one of our most popular and we are already in talks to collaborate with Flamingo Chicks again.

AUTISM IN MUSEUMS

The Science Museum Group's Head of Access and Equity, Fiona Slater, interviewed Claire Madge, autism awareness champion and founder of Autism in Museums, as part of a [fantastic blog post celebrating over 10 years of the Early Birds programme.](#)

Claire has been bringing her children to Early Birds sessions since their inception and has seen the programme develop as it has evolved in response to attendee feedback. For example, the introduction of Early Bird evening sessions for people who cannot attend the morning ones has opened the opportunity to more people.

Claire recently hosted one of her 'Autism in Museums Meet Up' events at the Science Museum, which allowed the team to walk through one of the temporary exhibitions with the group to better understand how changes could be made to make it accessible for an Early Birds event.



IMPACT

Early Birds and Night Owls remains a crucial part of the Science Museum's pledge to be *Open For All*. This is our commitment to making our sites – and STEM – more accessible to everyone. Ensuring that each event is a success is a priority for colleagues across the museum, and this mindset is integral to the continued success of the programme.

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.

YOUR SUPPORT

We express our sincere gratitude to the Trustees of The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation for their support towards Early Birds and Night Owls for over a decade. Your generosity has enabled us to allow our collections to be enjoyed by and inspire families with sensory needs.

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

We are thankful for your continuing support towards these events, which enables 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.



'I can't tell you what it means to parents to have these offered. 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. Thank you for including our kids in your museum events and enabling them to explore their passions to the max.'

EARLY BIRDS ATTENDEE

SCIENCE MUSEUM

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