

SCIENCE MUSEUM



EARLY BIRDS AND NIGHT OWLS

2025/26 ANNUAL REPORT FOR
THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE WOLFSON FOUNDATION



AN UPDATE REPORT PRESENTED TO THE LORD LEONARD AND LADY ESTELLE WOLFSON FOUNDATION APRIL 2026

OVERVIEW

The Science Museum seeks to inspire audiences through award-winning exhibitions, iconic objects, and compelling stories of scientific achievement. With origins dating back to the Great Exhibition of 1851, it has led the way in interactive science interpretation for over 80 years and is the UK's most popular museum for school visits.

Early Birds is a sensory-friendly programme run by the Science Museum, now in its second decade. Designed for visitors who may find the museum environment overwhelming during regular opening hours, it offers a calmer experience for those with autism spectrum conditions or sensory processing differences, among others.

These free sessions are aimed at families with children aged 4–15 and take place regularly throughout the year, either before or after standard opening times. Visitors benefit from exclusive access to the galleries, a range of engaging workshops, and designated quiet spaces for anyone who needs time away from the activity.

Night Owls offers a similar experience for visitors aged 16 and over, with sessions held exclusively after hours on selected dates across the year.

Visitors are invited to explore the galleries and take part in a variety of engaging activities throughout the museum during the events. Where possible, we adapt our operations and reduce sound levels across exhibits to create a more comfortable environment.

EVENTS AND ATTENDANCE

Event Date	Event Type	Attendees (Child)	Attendees (Adult)	Total
22 March 2025	Early Birds (Morning)	166	199	365
26 July 2025	Early Birds (Morning)	220	234	454
16 August 2025	Early Birds (Morning)	47	40	87
25 October 2025	Early Birds (Morning)	67	84	151
29 November 2025	Night Owls (Evening)	5	56	61
14 December 2025	Early Birds (Morning)	78	93	171
24 January 2026	Early Birds (Morning)	61	75	136
20 February 2026	Early Birds (Morning)	26	33	59
TOTAL		670	814	1,484

‘A massive, heartfelt thanks for this session today! I saw a different side to my son in a setting that was so calm and worry-free for him. He interacted with the amazing staff and explored the museum to his hearts content with no anxiety or worry and instead beautiful big smiles. I didn’t even realise how long we managed to stay! Thank you.’

EARLY BIRDS VISITOR, 2026

INSIGHTS AND UPDATES

Early Birds continues to be our most popular offering for accessible audiences. Over the past year, we were pleased to welcome 1,484 visitors across eight Early Birds and Night Owls sessions.

Whilst attendance has seen a dip in recent months, we are learning from visit patterns especially during the high-volume summer holidays and we plan on building on what we know works for the coming year. Additionally, we have taken lessons learnt from other Museum activities and have development plans to increase awareness and improve visibility of these events moving forward.

We have also increased the offering for our live shows, with relaxed performances for our visitors to Early Birds and Night Owls. These include performances of Science on a Sphere and Space shows which have received positive feedback from visitors at both Early birds and Night Owls.



'Early birds makes it possible for our whole family to visit the museum together. Thank you for the opportunity that the Early Birds sessions create for our family.'

EARLY BIRDS VISITOR, 2026

LOOKING FORWARDS

We are working with our Audience Insight team to conduct some research in 2026 to refresh our understanding of our visitor's experiences at our events and feed into programme improvements. We aim to learn about current motivations for attending, what they'd like to see more of at these events, to ensure we're keeping up with current trends and needs and delivering maximally impactful events.

Following feedback from Night Owls attendees we are also working to improve pre-event communications so visitors have a better idea of what to expect, understand the programming on offer in advance of attending, and overall enhancements to the visitor experience through pre-event emails and webpage improvements.

YOUR SUPPORT

We would like to express our sincere thanks to the Trustees of The Lord Leonard and Lady Estelle Wolfson Foundation for their support of Early Birds and Night Owls over the past decade. Your generosity has enabled more families with sensory needs to enjoy and be inspired by our collections.

Early Birds and Night Owls are among the Science Museum's most valued programmes, appreciated by visitors and staff alike for the welcoming and inclusive environment they create.

We are deeply grateful for your continued support, which allows even more people to experience the wonder of science in a setting that feels comfortable and accessible, free from the challenges of crowds and noise.

Thank you once again, and we look forward to sharing further updates with you in the future.

SCIENCE MUSEUM

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