

Risk Assessment for Visitors

During your visit we ask that visitors be attentive please to all instructions given by members as there is sensitive and expensive equipment, some of which is heavy and could potentially cause injury. Visitors with children should ensure they are attentive to instructions at all times and that they do not run around the site as they might injure themselves in the dark.

Car Parking

For the general public attending events you may use the car park at La Houquette School. Please be aware that there is no street lighting, so we recommend high visibility clothing and a torch. For those with mobility issues there is limited car parking available on entry to the observatory.

The car park/entrance to the observatory is a gravelled surface and therefore slightly uneven, but there are no exceptional surface hazards. Care should be taken when entering/leaving as there is a small dip (about 50 cm) on the left hand side as you enter the car park. There are two motion-sensor lights that illuminate the car parking area. They may occasionally be switched off, so it is advisable to bring a small torch.

Rear Grassed Area

As you walk round to the rear, the outside area is grass. It is fairly even, but not entirely flat and it may be damp from rain or dew, wearing suitable footwear is recommended. There are two red lights outside that illuminate some areas of the site, typically these will be on, but they give limited illumination so take care when moving around all external areas in the dark. It takes approximately 20 minutes for your eyes to fully adapt to the dark, after which you will be able to see more, so avoid using a white light torch and be extra careful until your eyes fully adapt to the darkness. The edging to the grassed area has been left to grow to provide habitat to wildlife and contains brambles and nettles.

There are four outdoor concrete pads to provide a flat surface for additional telescopes. On the large concrete pad in front of the main building there is a raised double power socket (about 10 cm height). When small telescopes are in use outside, this socket will typically be covered by the telescope. Otherwise, it will have a white plastic chair over it, in which case please do not remove the chair. The three smaller concrete pads might have telescopes on them, if they do there may be trailing power leads from the timber telescope building. If there are, they will have white plastic chairs over them. Do not move the chairs. When moving around any of the telescopes outside please be careful of any associated cables/leads and follow the instructions of the person operating the telescope. Telescopes are motor driven and slew at speed to observing targets, the operator will advise when this is about to happen and make sure everyone is standing at a safe distance.

Main Building

The main building is used for lectures and there is a single door entry from the outside concrete pad with a very slight sill of about 1 cm height. Typically, there will be either white or red light illumination inside. There are no known hazards. Members of the public are not generally permitted in the kitchen area to the rear. If dark outside then take care in exiting the main building, allowing for your eyes to adjust to the darkness. On the right hand side just inside the door there is a water and CO2 fire extinguisher.

Timber Telescope Building

To enter the telescope building there are two steps up to a single door, which have non-slip safety treads. There is a single white-painted handrail and on the opposite side is the opened door. There is a non-slip mat at the entrance and non-slip flooring throughout. Typically, there will be a red light on in the telescope building when observing, this is over the doorway and helps to illuminate the entrance/exit, care must be taken on and around the steps.

The telescope is motor driven and will slew at speed to observing targets, the operator will advise when this is about to happen and make sure everyone is standing at a safe distance. Do not stand between the telescope and two long walls of the telescope building as the gap can be limited when the telescope moves. The telescopes are situated at height to look over the walls and it may be necessary for smaller visitors to use steps. The person operating the will provide instruction and may offer to steady people with a supporting hand.

There is a 40 watt heater attached to the telescope column at floor level, it can get warm, but it is typically out of reach for visitors.

The telescope building may serve as a lecture room, in which case there might be white or red lighting.

Observing Protocols

It is helpful if those waiting their turn to look through a telescope can queue, and then, once they have had a look, move away from the telescope so that the next person can observe. However, we are happy for people to take their time to ensure that they get a good telescope view. There are no eye hazards from observing objects visible in the night sky. We generally guide viewers to the eyepiece of the telescope. Be careful you do not hit your head on the telescopes when moving forward to view and when moving away afterwards. A small stepladder is available for use when the telescope eyepiece is in a high position, especially for smaller visitors who may not be tall enough. The ladder should not be too close or too far, the person should be able to stand upright, without unduly leaning forward or backward, and should not mount higher than the second step, holding onto the rail provided on the ladder. The telescope operator may offer to steady people with a supporting hand.

Please do not touch the telescopes, as this can cause them to go out of alignment, which takes time to re-establish. Please be attentive to guidance from Astronomy Section members at all times.

Solar Observing

Generally, the same rules above will apply. All our telescopes are fitted with appropriate filters to allow safe solar observation. These filters must not be removed or tampered with, and all instructions given by Astronomy Section members must be followed. Visitors should be advised of the dangers of looking at the sun directly or through optical instruments without the correct glasses or filters. An additional solar observing risk assessment can be found on our website: <https://www.astronomy.org.gg/do-and-see/health-and-safety>