

Alex Panto - HCAP Scholarship Report - Midlands Gliding Club (August 2025)

As a keen aviation enthusiast and an aspiring pilot, I've always wanted the opportunity to learn to fly. Unfortunately, the industry has many obstacles and barriers that ultimately makes flying inaccessible for many. When I came across this scholarship opportunity, I jumped at the opportunity to apply and filled out the necessary forms. When I was invited for an interview at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots' office in London, I realised that this was no longer just an opportunity, but a potential reality. From the moment I was accepted onto the course and then assigned to the Midlands Gliding Club, I couldn't wait to start.

Our first day began with an introduction to the site where we learned many safety precautions, operating procedures and met with the key personnel on site. Although Sunday wasn't meant to be an actual day for the course, we were lucky enough to head outside and assist with the launching and retrieval of members' gliders at the club, learning the ropes on the very first day.

On Monday morning, we met our instructors Rhys and Sam who introduced themselves and gave us a brief overview on what they had planned for the week. We were given our gliding logbooks and the British Gliding Association manual, allowing us to understand theoretical concepts. This was particularly important during the first few days during a turbulent start due to weather meaning we had to focus on understanding the concepts of gliding after briefings from our instructors. These briefings were pivotal when it came to actually flying as it allowed us to apply our knowledge to a real-life situation. When we eventually got into regular flying after the poor weather had cleared, it was truly an incredible experience to see how myself and my fellow course members worked together seamlessly to keep the flying operations going. Tasks on the ground varied from launching, retrieve winch driving and glider retrieval but, despite the variation in roles and low manpower, we all stuck together to keep things running.

At first, the actual flying wasn't as easy as I had expected. Having never flown before, I was somewhat walking into the unknown. However, from the very moment that I sat in the cockpit and assisted with the preflight checks, my instructor Rhys guided me on what I needed to do. Having launched for the first time and taking controls, I had a shaky start getting used to the aircraft. After a short while, I became more confident and eventually was able to take full control of the aircraft for the launch. Additionally, thanks to the briefings provided to us, I had some confidence for landing the glider on my own. After a few tries, I was able to land the glider on my own. Although my first landing was bumpier than I expected, I quickly learned the skills needed and applied them to future landings, constantly improving my techniques.

Overall, going from having never flown before to being able to launch and land a glider is an achievement that I am immensely proud of and incredibly grateful for. I would like to thank the team at the Midlands Gliding Club as well as the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for this opportunity and I hope to continue gliding in the future alongside applying to new opportunities.

