

Alexander Coe – Gliding Report - Air Pilots Benevolent Fund

In the summer of 2025, I had the incredible opportunity to participate in a week long gliding scholarship at Cotswold Gliding Club, generously sponsored by the Air Pilots Benevolent Fund. As someone with a long standing dream of becoming a professional pilot, this experience was not only educational but also deeply inspiring. The course offered me the chance to fly regularly, gain essential aviation knowledge, and most memorably complete my first solo flight. More than just a flying course, the scholarship connected me with an amazing community of aviation professionals and enthusiasts who helped bring my aspirations into sharper focus.

From the very first day, the atmosphere at the club was welcoming and motivating. The entire team, from instructors to ground crew and volunteers, created an environment that was both professional and supportive. Despite the early mornings and long days, there was never a moment where I didn't feel encouraged and valued. The people running the course were not only highly experienced but also incredibly kind, patient, and genuinely passionate about helping young people succeed in aviation. They went out of their way to ensure everyone felt included, supported, and well fed (quite literally), as the catering and hospitality throughout the week were excellent!

The structure of the scholarship was both rigorous and rewarding. Each day began with a morning briefing that covered weather conditions, safety procedures, and the day's flying plans. We were rotated through various roles: from flying to helping on the ground with winch launches, glider handling, and logging flights, ensuring that we developed a full understanding of how a gliding operation functions.

The flying itself was everything I had hoped for and more. With several flights each day, weather permitting, I was able to progress rapidly through the gliding syllabus under the guidance of skilled and supportive instructors. My training started with the basics: understanding flight controls, maintaining coordinated flight, and mastering turns. As the week progressed, I advanced to more complex skills, including launch failure simulations, circuit planning, and landing techniques.

What stood out to me most was the way the instructors tailored their teaching to each student's pace. They were constantly providing feedback after every flight, helping me improve with each circuit. Their confidence in my abilities was incredibly motivating, and as I neared the end of the week, I was thrilled (and slightly nervous) to be told I was ready to go solo.

My first solo flight is a memory I will never forget. Being launched into the sky alone, without an instructor beside me, was both exhilarating and empowering. The silence of the cockpit, the feeling of being completely responsible for the glider, and the smoothness of the circuit and landing filled me with pride and gratitude. That single flight represented not just a technical milestone, but a major personal achievement. A confirmation that I was capable of taking control and flying safely and independently. It solidified my passion for aviation and deepened my commitment to pursuing it as a career.

Another highlight of the scholarship was the opportunity to connect with professional pilots, both current and retired, from civilian and military backgrounds. Throughout the week, there were

opportunities to chat with pilots who had flown everything from commercial airliners to military jets. For someone like me, whose dream is to follow in their footsteps, these conversations were invaluable.

The advice and insights they shared helped me understand the different routes into aviation, the challenges of training and working in the industry, and what life is really like as a professional pilot. Hearing their personal stories, especially how many of them started out just like me, learning in gliders, was incredibly inspiring. Speaking with these individuals helped me realise that the path I want to take is both possible and rewarding, even if it requires patience, hard work, and dedication.

The community feel of Cotswold Gliding Club also had a lasting impact on me. It wasn't just about flying, it was about working as a team, being part of something bigger, and contributing to a shared passion. Every person I met at the club played a part in making the scholarship so memorable, from the volunteers helping to launch gliders, to those offering encouragement, advice, and stories throughout the week.

Reflecting on the experience, I can confidently say that this scholarship has been one of the most meaningful and formative experiences of my life so far. I left Aston Down with new skills, new friends, and a clear sense of direction for my future. I've gained real flying experience, completed my first solo, and been mentored by some of the most inspiring individuals I've ever met. More importantly, I've come away with the belief that I can make my dream of becoming a professional pilot a reality.

I am incredibly grateful to the Air Pilots Benevolent Fund for making this opportunity possible. Their investment in young aspiring aviators like myself is truly life changing. I also want to thank everyone at Cotswold Gliding Club for their time, dedication, and encouragement throughout the week. I will carry everything I learned with me as I continue my journey in aviation.