

Ellie Alcock

RAFCT Gliding Scholarship 2025

Gliding provides one of the best paths into the world of aviation. Nothing beats the thrill of raw flying, without an engine, completely dependent on the environment and weather. I will never forget my first winch launch, and I had no idea how much it would change my life.

When I applied for the Honourable Company of Air Pilots gliding scholarship, I had just joined the gliding society at University, where I was introduced to the world of gliding, and was curious to explore it further. I never imagined that it would lead me to have one of the most influential weeks of my life. Upon arriving at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre for my scholarship, I had just gone solo, as after finishing my University studies, I had the good fortune of being able to invest some more time into my passion. However, I had learnt to realise that you never stop learning just because you're solo. In fact, that's only when the learning really begins. When you're up there on your own, there is no one else there to take over if things go wrong – you have to surrender to the environment and trust the aircraft, and most importantly yourself and your training. That is one of the biggest things I have gained from this week.

At the beginning of the week, I felt nervous and apprehensive – despite already being solo, my imposter syndrome was almost overwhelming. On that first day, I was immediately welcomed and made to feel like I belonged to be there. PNGC were understanding and accommodating of the fact that I was already solo, and they pushed me to keep improving and refining my gliding skills.

On the first day, I had a site check in the Duo Discus – a high-performance glider that I'd never had the privilege of flying before. I managed to improve my thermalling technique and stay up for over an hour, making it my longest flight in a glider! On the second day, I was sent solo in the K21, after another check flight and simulated launch failure. On the third day, I converted to the Astir – my first ever conversion into a single seater! However, during the winch launch I quickly realised that my Air Speed Indicator wasn't working properly. I stayed calm, remained focused, and remembered my training. I landed



the glider safely and was praised for making a perfect landing despite not knowing what speed I was flying at! Initially, my confidence was knocked, and I felt nervous about going up again, but once I got back in the glider the day after, I faced my fear and realised that if I could fly without an ASI on my first conversion flight, maybe I really was capable of



being a glider pilot! The following days involved continuing to adjust to flying the Astir, and I eventually got away for a 30-minute soaring flight on my own! On the final day, I had the pleasure of an aerobatics flight with an instructor. I thermalled to 5000ft off the winch launch, and even got to have a go at a few loops myself! It was so much fun, I couldn't stop grinning after I landed.

Throughout the week, we had some very inspirational talks from people from all walks of aviation. We had talks from a Typhoon pilot, an Apache pilot and two commercial pilots – each story was just as inspiring as the next. I found these talks incredibly useful, as I was reminded why I'm chasing my dream of becoming a commercial pilot.

The inspirational people I had the opportunity to talk to, supportive friends I made, and challenges I faced during the week, truly inspired me and reinforced my love for flying. The community at PNGC were so welcoming and supportive, encouraging me to believe in myself and see my potential. I owe much to HCAP and the RAF Charitable Trust for providing this unforgettable opportunity. I left the week feeling completely different to the person as I was when I walked into the doors of the Officer's Mess on that first day.

I encourage everyone who thinks aviation might be for them to apply to this scholarship and say yes to every opportunity that presents itself. You never know what might happen!