

Joseph Collins – The Royal Air Force Charitable Trust Gliding Scholarship

I am grateful to have been awarded the Selective 2026 Gliding Scholarship from The Honourable Company of Air Pilots, When I first applied I was determined to expand and develop my pilot competencies and make the most of this opportunity the best I could at Derby and Lancs Gliding Club.

Start of the week

When making my way to the Derby & Lancs Gliding Club, There was initially some Difficulty getting there due to secluded location within Peak District National Park. The HCAP Organisers helped with arranged transport from the club with Silvia, who was very friendly and welcoming when I met her, making the start of experience very pleasant

On arrival was greeted by John who was similarly pleasant and welcoming along with my instructor for the week, Hans and 5 other scholars (William, Jakub, Olivia, Isla and Ruhma).

Throughout the Week

On the First Flight, I was a bit nervous not knowing what to expect. I began by putting the parachute on and carrying out the Required safety checks (ABCDE & CBSIFTBEC). The actual winch launch felt like a rocket launch, as I did not expect the immediate gain in altitude or the steep angle of climb after take-off. But over the week, the uncomfortable feeling went away with the continued practice and exposure. Besides the actual flying, we also learnt the basics of manoeuvring the gliders out of the hangar and attaching the winch cable, using the tractors to transport them safely to different launch points (North, West and South) and how meteorology significantly affects the ability to fly.

The actual flying varied heavily from day to day depending on the thermals and ridge conditions. In the Puchacz, Hans gave me the majority of the controls, allowing me to learn how to take off, manoeuvre using the rudder and control stick, and interpret the instruments. I struggled at first to maintain coordinated flight, which was clearly highlighted in Hans' feedback, but I appreciated his honesty as it allowed me to understand where I needed to improve. From day to day, I was gradually able to improve.

For example, thermalling was a bit challenging, as it combined the skill of turning while maintaining a speed of at least 50 knots during the climb, without pitching too low or too high, while also maintaining a consistent pitch attitude. I was able to achieve these skills in short bursts, but I recognised that they would become more natural with further exposure and practice. Overall, I accumulated a total of **4.3 hours of gliding** throughout the week.



Conclusion

From this experience, I was able to conclude that being a pilot requires a high level of multitasking, with pilot competencies such as communication, coordination, situational awareness and decision-making being embedded throughout the flying experience. These are skills that I will continue to improve and develop as I progress in my career within aviation.

I would like to Thank John and Silvia for their hospitality, Hans for being my instructor, HCAP for this opportunity, my fellow Scholars for making it an incredible experience and the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust for Sponsoring me.

