

Sophie Wonnacott

The Virgin Atlantic Gliding Scholarship 2025

Hi, my name is Sophie. I did a 5-day course at Lasham Gliding Society from 4th-8th of August and I had an amazing time! I arrived on Sunday and got to meet my fellow scholar, we were able to get our bearings around the airfield and become closer as friends before our training began on Monday morning. I arrived with no experience with regards to gliding but everyone was extremely welcoming and always eager to answer my many questions.



On Monday the weather was poor but this was good as it allowed us to cover the theory behind gliding and we were able to use the club's simulators to familiarise us with the instruments. This meant that for my first lesson I was entering the cockpit already knowing some background information and learning this information early on helped me throughout the week as I was able to apply what I had learnt practically. We were also able to explore Lasham's facilities a bit more, such as the Gliding Heritage Centre's two hangers which was really interesting.



My first flight was 9 minutes long on Monday night when the weather improved and it was absolutely magical, it was a sunset flight and the sky was clear. I was fascinated by how fast the winch launch was, it felt like a rollercoaster.



We were extremely fortunate with the weather the rest of the week which allowed me to complete an amazing total of 27 launches and 5.22 hours of flight time across the 5 days, 3 of these launches were aerotow.

I wanted to get involved with all aspects of gliding and I quickly learned that it was a team effort to get the gliders into the air. I found it fun retrieving the gliders and towing them to the launch point, changing cable links, cleaning the gliders (which I was surprised can get extremely dirty after 1 day of use) and communicating with the winch point. I found it extremely satisfying watching the gliders rise into the air as I felt the wing's trailing edge leaving my hand.

I had wonderful instructors, Sushil Bajpai and Claudia Hill who were very supportive, knowledgeable and patient. By the end of the week, they had taught me how to take off, complete a circuit and land successfully and gave me the confidence to do my own thing in the air before re-entering the circuit, my longest flight was 42 minutes thanks to good thermals and teaching.



I would like to say a massive thank you to HCAP for providing me with this opportunity and for Virgin Atlantic for sponsoring me. This has given me memories which will last a lifetime, I will never forget my first time up in a glider. This is a significant stepping stone towards my dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot. I would strongly encourage anyone who is thinking about applying for a HCAP scholarship to go for it!