

HCAP AFG Gliding Scholarship 2025 – Harvey Osborne

Earlier this year, I was fortunate enough to be awarded a place on a Gliding Scholarship at the Midlands Gliding Club, run by the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. The scholarship was designed to introduce young people to the principles of gliding, develop our flying skills, and provide first-hand experience of life at an active gliding club.

Over the course, I learned the basics of glider handling, launches, circuits, approaches, and landings. I also took part in all the ground operations needed to keep flights running safely. By the end of the scholarship, I had accomplished a “ghosted solo”, where I completed an entire flight without any input from the instructor.

In this report, I will describe what a typical day on the course looked like, some of the challenges I faced, and how the scholarship has benefited me as a cadet and aspiring pilot.

A Typical Day on the Scholarship

Morning Briefing and Setting up the Airfield

Each day started early. After breakfast, myself, the other students and instructors met in the clubhouse for the daily briefing. The briefing covered the weather forecast, wind strength and direction, cloud base, airspace restrictions, and the circuit plan for the day. There were many apps and websites used to ensure that it was safe to fly on the day. Safety points were also discussed; as safety was, of course, a priority.

After the briefing, we headed to the hangar to unpack the gliders. We would push, pull, lift and turn these gliders to get them out of the hanger and prepared for towing (It was quite surprising how many gliders fit into a small hanger!). It further included checking the aircraft for any damage, making sure the control surfaces were working properly by resisting opposite forces, as well as confirming that the parachutes and equipment were correctly installed. Even though the instructors also carried out their own checks, being involved provided me a sense of responsibility and taught me how vital pre-flight checks are.

We also set up the airfield. This involved positioning the winch launch vehicle at the far end of the airfield, laying out the launch cables, and setting up the launch point with radios, logbooks, and other equipment. Everyone helped with these jobs, which showed how teamwork is an essential part of gliding operations.

Morning Flying

Once the airfield was ready, flying began. At the start of the course, on the first day, my instructor demonstrated the exercises while I followed through. It involved the operations of a winch launch, straight and level flight, thermalling, stable turning and approaches. As the week went on, I took more and more control of the aircraft myself.

Thermalling is how gliders gain their altitude. As they don't have engines, they use the heat sources from the ground to gain lift and ascend. It is quite interesting, and I would recommend doing some research on the basic principles of flight in a glider before doing the course, it helped me greatly.



We launched using a winch, which is a very fast and steep climb that gives you a big adrenaline rush. After we released the cable, we went over the basic flying operations and investigated stalling in a glider. The shudders of a mushing stall were quite fun to be honest!

When I wasn't flying, I helped on the ground by hooking on gliders to the winch cable, signalling for launches using the retrieve winch, and helping retrieve the cables after each launch. This gave me an appreciation for the work that goes on behind the scenes to keep flights running smoothly. Especially when we were doing circuits, gliders went up, around and down quickly; this tested our ground skills and efficiency to get the gliders turned around as quick as possible.

Lunch and Afternoon Flying

At around twelve o'clock, we paused briefly for lunch, in which the service was very flexible, and the food was delicious!



In the afternoon sessions, I focused more on approach and landing practice, which I found the most challenging part of the course. Unlike powered aircraft, gliders have no engine, so you must judge the circuit and glide path very carefully. Approaches are also much steeper than those in powered flying. Like my instructor said, you only get one chance of landing so the judgment of the approach must be perfect! Throughout our weekly briefs, we learnt how to judge over and undershoots as well as how to recover from them which made judging approaches easier but still a challenge.

At first, I often turned too early or too late, which affected whether I overshot or undershot the airfield. Another challenging aspect was the weather; as it was different everyday it changed how you needed to plan your circuit. Sometimes you had to turn onto base leg a lot earlier as there were quite a large headwind and some days, we had more room to plan our circuits with a weaker headwind. With a lot of practice and feedback from my instructor, as well as additional time on the simulator in the evenings, my circuit planning improved significantly.

My Highlights

As the course progressed, my confidence grew. Near the end of the scholarship, I completed a “ghosted solo” flight. On this flight, the instructor stayed in the back seat but did not touch the controls or give any input. I carried out the launch, circuit, approach and landing entirely by myself.

This was a major highlight of the scholarship for me and showed how far my flying skills had developed in such a short time. It was an incredible feeling to know I could handle the aircraft on my own. It felt almost surreal when I did my first every landing; rushes of

excitement as well as nerves fill you. I did feel really accomplished by the end of my ghosted solo flight; it felt as though a lot of hard work and determination had really paid off.

Despite doing it every day, the groundwork never became boring. It included retrieving gliders from the far end of the airfield, taking responsibility for the retrieve winch, and assisting other students with launches by running their wing or clipping them in. It reinforced how gliding depends on teamwork both in the air and on the ground.

End of Day Duties

Flying usually continued until early evening, depending on daylight hours and weather conditions. At the end of the day, we packed the gliders back into the hangar and ensured all equipment was put away properly.

Even though the days were long and sometimes physically demanding, most importantly they were extremely rewarding. Helping with the full range of duties at the club made me feel like a valued member of the team rather than just a visitor.

Challenges Faced

The biggest challenge for me was judging the landing circuit accurately. Without an engine, you have only one chance to position the glider correctly. Early on, I struggled to judge when to turn onto the final approach and how high I should be.

With practice in person, on the simulator, and guidance from my instructor, I learned how to assess my height and position more accurately. Having access to a simulator definitely helped with training. It helped with judgement and accuracy before taking it to the sky. By the end of the course, my approaches and landings were far more consistent and safer.

Another challenge was keeping up with the fast pace of the course. The days were physically and mentally tiring because of the amount of work involved, but I soon adapted. Important things like memorising pre-flight checks and understanding the rules of the sky were only parts of the critical areas you need to learn about: it taught me the importance of staying focused and working as part of a team throughout the whole week.

What I Gained from the Scholarship

The scholarship gave me far more than just flying skills. It helped me develop self-discipline, teamwork, and a stronger understanding of aviation and gliding principles.

Since completing the scholarship, I have attended an interview and been awarded a place on the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme (ACPS), where I will train further on powered aircraft. The gliding scholarship was a major reason I felt confident enough to apply, and it gave me valuable experience to talk about in my interview.

The scholarship also confirmed my ambition to pursue a career in aviation. It showed me the level of skill and dedication required and gave me a realistic insight into the responsibilities of a pilot.

Conclusion

My time at the Midlands Gliding Club on the Honourable Company of Air Pilots AFG Scholarship was an unforgettable and highly valuable experience. With new friends made that I will share memories with forever and priceless new knowledge that I will continue to expand on.

The scholarship not only gave me my first experience of flying gliders, but it also taught me the teamwork and perseverance that make aviation possible. From unpacking the gliders each morning, to launching and recovering them all day, to packing them away at night, to the nights spent learning the pre-flight checks. I was valued throughout the scholarship, and we all were essential assets to the operations of the airfield.

Completing a “ghosted” solo flight was a huge milestone for me, and the knowledge and confidence I gained will stay with me as I continue flying through the Air Cadets and beyond.

I would like to finish this report with a massive thank you to all the staff involved with the operations at HCAP for the funds they provided and the efficiency of their company to provide these incredible experiences. I would highly recommend this scholarship to anyone, experienced or not, with an interest in aviation.

