

THE RED ARROWS TRUST GLIDING SCHOLARSHIP 2026

Isla Kotecha

Over the past few years, my interest in aviation has grown into a strong ambition to become a commercial airline pilot. Being awarded a gliding scholarship from the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, sponsored by the Red Arrows Trust, has given me an incredible opportunity to take my first real steps into the world of aviation. I was with my Dad when I received the acceptance email and what followed was weeks of excitement and anticipation until the course started in July.

I opted to take a place at the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club. On arrival, I met the other scholars who I would be flying and working alongside throughout the week. Once settled in, we met our instructors and had our first introduction to life at the club, which included learning how to use the tractor to retrieve and transport the gliders around the airfield.

The first morning we began the daily checks on the gliders. My first flight at the Camphill base lasted around 30 minutes with my instructor, Alan. After the launch, he allowed me control of the glider before taking over again for the landing. It was an amazing feeling to be flying the aircraft myself for the first time.

Throughout the week, I developed my gliding skills in a range of weather conditions. Changing winds meant that we operated from three different launch points, allowing me to see how both the launch and landing changed depending on the conditions. Luckily, we also had plenty of sunshine for most of the week!

We worked in groups of three and, when we weren't flying, we helped with the ground operations. This included flight logging, retrieving the gliders, attaching the winch cable and supporting the wing during launch. I really enjoyed this side of the experience because it showed me how much teamwork is involved in getting every flight safely into the air.

As the week progressed, I became much more confident in controlling the glider and began to understand how delicate and precise the controls can be. By the end of the week, I was able to take control during both launches and landings, something I had never imagined I would feel confident enough to do after only five days. I would not have been able to achieve this without the guidance, patience and support of my instructor, Alan.

The week taught me much more than simply how to fly a glider. It developed my confidence, decision-making and awareness, while also showing me the importance of teamwork and responsibility in aviation. Most importantly, it confirmed that flying is something I would love to pursue as a career.

I would like to thank everyone at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, the Red Arrows Trust and the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club, as well as the instructors who gave their time to make the week possible. I am extremely grateful to have this opportunity and will remember the experience for many years to come.

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