

Isabel Button

The Red Arrows Trust Gliding Scholarship 2025

During the summer of 2025, I had the privilege of taking part in the Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP) Gliding Scholarship. As a member of the RAF Air Cadets, I had previously completed several gliding induction flights at RAF Topcliffe. These flights, while valuable, were limited to short circuits and provided only a small insight into the world of gliding. When I received the notification that I had been selected for the HCAP scholarship, I was absolutely thrilled. The scholarship represented a unique opportunity to broaden my aviation knowledge, develop my flying skills, and gain first-hand experience of what it means to be part of a gliding community.

The course was hosted by the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club (DLGC), located at Camphill Farm in Buxton. The drive to the airfield was breathtaking, with the winding countryside roads adding to the sense of excitement and anticipation.

One of the most memorable aspects of the week was the hospitality. Each day began with a hearty full English breakfast and ended with freshly cooked evening meals. The sense of community at DLGC was strong, and John, who prepared the meals, was always quick to accommodate any requests, making us feel welcome and at home throughout the week.

The training extended beyond the cockpit. I gained practical skills that were vital to the running of the airfield and essential for understanding gliding operations. These included:

- Tractor driving – an essential skill for moving gliders and equipment around the airfield safely.
- Winch signaling – learning the correct signals for safe launches taught me the importance of clear communication and precision.

- Glider rigging – one evening, when a member needed help assembling his glider, we all worked together to complete the task. This gave me an appreciation for the engineering and teamwork required to maintain airworthiness.

The club's facilities further supported our learning. A lecture room provided a space for daily briefs, where instructors outlined the weather, flight plans, and objectives for the day. Additionally, DLGC had a flight simulator available in case of poor weather conditions. Fortunately, the skies were kind to us, and we enjoyed consistent opportunities to fly, so the simulator was not needed.

Over the course of the week, I averaged five flights a day, with flight durations ranging from 10 to 40 minutes. This gave me a significant amount of time in the air and a strong foundation of practical flying experience.

Each day focused on developing a different aspect of flying. Early on, I built confidence in basic handling: keeping a good lookout, trimming the glider correctly, maintaining speed, and making smooth turns. As the course progressed, I was introduced to more advanced exercises including stalls, spins, and ridge soaring. These were particularly exciting as they pushed me outside of my comfort zone and required me to think more deeply about energy management and decision-making in the cockpit.

The highlight of my flying came towards the end of the course. By then, I was able to take full control of the glider from launch to landing. This meant handling the glider from the moment of take-off, managing the entire flight, and completing a safe landing before exiting the aircraft. The satisfaction of flying a full sortie independently was an incredible achievement and a defining moment in my aviation journey so far.

One of the unique aspects of the HCAP scholarship is the emphasis on involvement in all parts of gliding, not just the flying itself. Within only a few days, we were entrusted to take responsibility for key roles on the airfield with minimal instructor supervision. This rapid progression gave me a strong sense of responsibility and accomplishment.

The experience developed me in several important ways:

- Confidence – Taking full control of a glider gave me confidence in my abilities and decision-making under pressure.
- Teamwork – Whether it was launching gliders, retrieving cables, or preparing aircraft, nothing could be achieved without cooperation. I quickly learned the importance of supporting others and relying on the team.
- Adaptability – Flying is heavily influenced by weather conditions, and I learned to adapt plans quickly and effectively, a skill that will be vital in any aviation role.
- Technical understanding – From rigging gliders to observing maintenance checks, I gained a broader awareness of the technical side of aviation.

These skills go beyond gliding and will benefit me in my future aspirations, whether that be within commercial aviation, the military, or elsewhere.

Looking back, the HCAP Gliding Scholarship was not only about learning how to fly but also about gaining a much deeper appreciation for aviation. The sense of community at DLGC was inspiring. Everyone, from instructors to club members, was generous with their time and knowledge, and their passion for gliding was infectious.

What I enjoyed most was the balance between independence and support. Instructors trusted us to take on responsibilities early, which accelerated our learning and gave us a true sense of achievement. The most challenging aspect was learning to manage the glider during unfamiliar exercises like spins and

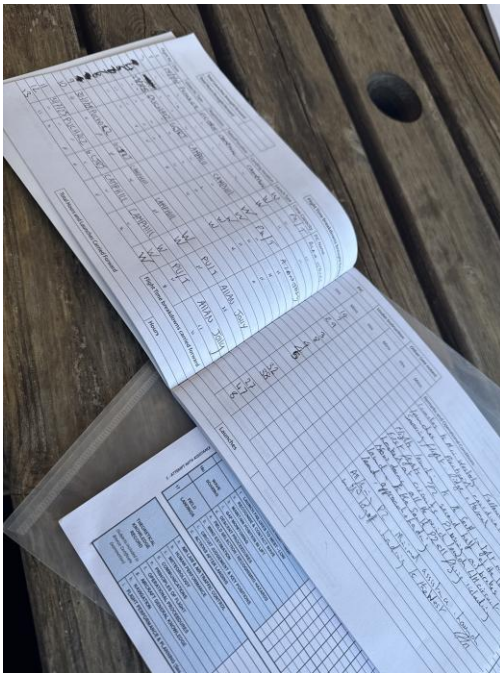
stalls. These moments tested my composure, but overcoming them gave me confidence that I can handle pressure in demanding situations.

The scholarship has inspired me to keep pursuing opportunities in aviation. It has shown me the importance of continuous learning, discipline, and teamwork, all of which will serve me well as I progress in the RAF Air Cadets and beyond.

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship has been a pivotal step in my aviation journey. It has expanded my understanding of flight far beyond my previous experiences at RAF Topcliffe and given me valuable hands-on flying time. I now have a greater appreciation for the technical and operational demands of gliding, as well as the personal qualities required to succeed as a pilot.

To any aspiring pilot, I would strongly recommend gliding as a starting point. It teaches energy management, planning, and adaptability in a way that powered flying cannot, while also being accessible and community driven.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for offering me this opportunity, and to the instructors and members of DLGC who dedicated their time and expertise to supporting us. I am proud to have made the most of every moment, and I look forward to building on the knowledge, skills, and confidence that this scholarship has given me.





This was us rigging the glider!

