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RAFCT Gliding Scholarship Report 2025

There's no real way to prepare for being in a glider, the sound of the wind around the canopy, no engine noise and a view that stretches for miles across the Welsh hills.

My gliding scholarship with the Honourable Company of Air Pilots took place at Midland Gliding Club in the summer of 2025. Over the week, I completed 11 launches, with my longest flight lasting 1 hour and 7 minutes. But it wasn't just the airtime that defined the experience. It was everything in between. My journey started through an Air Experience Flight at RAF Benson where I fell in love with everything about gliders, from thermalling to launch failures.



Sunday evening, the drive up to the Mynd was scenic and beautiful, with sheep and horses out in the open. It started off with a few nerves but a lot of enthusiasm. The clubhouse felt instantly welcoming - quiet, remote but buzzing with the energy of the week ahead. We were introduced to the instructors, Mark Sanders and Sam Prin, and got a tour of the site. I was under Mark's wing and throughout the week he gave me increasing responsibility in the cockpit.

The real flying started Monday morning. After unpacking the hangar and setting up the launch point, we learned how to daily inspect (DI) the glider, how to run with the wing, operate the return winch, and most importantly how to scare sheep off the runway. That turned into a running joke, but it's genuinely important at the Mynd. I had 4 short launches that day, each flight gave me more control time. From first handling the stick to basic turns and trimming, I started to feel what flying without an engine really meant. The instructors made sure we were learning actively, not just sitting back. It was full-on from the start, and I loved it. The day ended around 18:00, where we returned the gliders to the hangar and afterwards enjoyed a lovely meal at the clubhouse.



Tuesday, we woke up to perfect weather and clear skies. We got up early around 8:00 and unpacked the hangar. I flew once that day, but it lasted 54 minutes, where I was able to climb 1500 ft in a thermal, circling upwards in a smooth invisible lift. I was on the controls during our time in the thermal, it was a great first long flight experience. The rest of the day was mainly spent on the simulator and eating KitKats from the kitchen! We ended the day with a walk to the edge of the ridge to catch the sunset. Classic Mynd evening.

Wednesday. Two launches – both unforgettable. The first lasted 1 hour 7 minutes, we caught on to some strong ridge lift and stayed airborne, not experiencing much sink. I worked on my pitch control and efficient turns across the ridge. The second launch was... short. One minute, to be exact. A real cable failure at 400ft, I heard the ping and felt the sudden pitch change. Mark quickly took control and headed us back safely. It was a brief experience, but possibly the most valuable. Anything can happen but we were prepared. Thursday was a similar day but more launches, shorter flights. We ended the day with a fun card game.



Then Friday came, the weather was immaculate - clear skies, sunshine and perfect wind. It felt like the Mynd was showing off. We launched early and everything I'd learned through the week finally came together: planning circuits, take-offs and landings. Each flight felt smoother, more instinctive. The aerobatics were something else! My favourite was the loop, the feeling of looking up and seeing the land instead of the skies was exhilarating. Lunch quickly became a chatter on what aerobatics everyone did.

That evening, a representative from HCAP came to meet us. He joined us in the clubhouse midday and stayed into the evening, sharing his aviation journey and asking about ours. We had a casual talk, and it was one of the most inspiring moments in the week. His advice stuck with me: treat every flight like a lesson, not a performance. He presented us with certificates, one by one. It felt like proper recognition, not just for completing the course, but for how far we'd come since Sunday. By now, we weren't just a bunch of enthusiasts learning to fly. We were friends, teammates and in a small way, pilots.



I came to the Mynd with minimal gliding experience and no real idea what to expect. Five days later, I could launch, fly, and land. I'd thermalled to over 1500ft, flown the ridge for over an hour, and dealt with a real cable failure. I made friends I'll stay in touch with and learned that sheep are strangely drawn to launch points.

But the biggest thing I took away was confidence, not just in flying, but in myself. I've always known I want to become a pilot, and this course gave me the space to build the skills and self-belief to pursue that path seriously. I am going to look for further opportunities to pursue my dream towards becoming a pilot such as the HCAP PPL scholarships and British Airways' Speedbird Academy.

Huge thanks to my instructor, Mark Sanders, for his outstanding instruction, Sam Prin for being such a great presence and support throughout, and the Midland Gliding

Club team: especially the kitchen staff, who somehow never ran out of KitKats. Thank you very much to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and the RAF Charitable Trust for making this experience possible.

If you're thinking of applying, do it. Even if you're unsure. Even if you've never flown before. Because five days can change a lot, especially from 3,000 feet up.