

RAFCT Gliding Scholarship – Xawery Wisniewski

Hello, my name is Xawery and I am currently studying Aeronautical Engineering at university. After a few years of applying, I was finally successful and got offered to complete a weekly gliding residential course at Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club this summer. My dream is to become a pilot and this course has been invaluable in developing my flying skillset. I had previous experience with gliding in Air Cadets but I learned that the military course is very different to civilian training. If you are an aspiring pilot or interested in aviation, I would highly recommend the Honourable Company of Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship. It is an experience like no other.



All the applicants arrived on Sunday afternoon and were given a tour of the Club. We got given our first lesson: tractor driving. I know, it may sound intriguing, but they are essential to recovering gliders after they land and to transporting them to the launch point and to and from the hangar. Additionally, they were great fun to drive and one of the highlights of the week. After a delicious, homemade like dinner we were taught about daily inspections and pre-flight safety checks. These would become part of our routines before flying.

So, the first day the weather was not very good. In the morning, we were taught some theory due to the rain and flew on the simulator which was a new experience to me. The simulator was very realistic and I covered some circuits with my instructor who was right behind me like in the real glider. In the afternoon the weather cleared up and I had 2 launches consisting of about 3 minutes each.

On Tuesday, unfortunately the weather was the same, however, we endured it all day and this time I had 4 launches which were all again around 3 minutes each. I covered take offs and landings with my instructor. In the evening, we played some cards games and had a good laugh.

On Wednesday the weather started to finally pick up. There was a caveat though, crosswinds, which made take-offs and landing difficult. There was some thermal activity which allowed us to stay up in the air longer-up to 30 minutes. Thermal soaring was a new experience to me and it quite amazing how a non-powered aircraft can gain height just due to weather conditions. Performing tight turns around hot rising air feels like magic as you can see the altimeter going up when your mind is telling you that you should be losing height.



So, Thursday arrived very quickly, and I was glad it did. It was the best day for everyone on the course due to the perfect weather conditions! This meant I could really show what I can do in the glider. My instructor sent me up with another instructor but this time I had my altimeter covered up. This meant I did not know how high of the ground I was. What a great exercise! It was a great challenge, and I really enjoyed it. Having my altimeter covered up meant that I had to look outside a lot more to gage my height. I found that I was more aware of my surroundings and did not feel the pressure to rejoin the circuit as early as possible. Thursday was definitely the highlight of my week.



On the left you can see my second launch on Thursday. It was a 16-minute-long flight.

The small circles you can see is me thermal soaring and some bigger ones are me losing height.

Finally, Friday came and the weather had totally flipped the script. We were taking of the southside of the field instead of the north like we had the rest of the week. Additionally, the crosswind was the worst it had been yet. Nevertheless, we soldiered on and got to experience ridge soaring. Ridge soaring only works when wind encounters a hill or a ridge and the only way for the wind to go is up. Gliders use this upward wind to stay up above the ridge. What is great about Camphill is that you get to experience these different forms of lift due to the surrounding landscape. This is something unique compared to a lot of gliding clubs plus the views are great.



It was not the best day for flying but I learned how to ridge soar and got to practice my crosswind landings and take offs. After packing the gliders at the end of the day, Martin (who works for HCAP and a pilot himself), presented us with our gliding certificates. It was amazing to chat with him and to hear his aviation story. He gave all of us such good advice as prospective pilots.

As the week went on, I became more confident in gliding and learned a lot about meteorology to maximise the weather conditions for the given day. I gained so much knowledge about soaring techniques and how to fly in any weather conditions. Only after the course, I found out, the reason why my instructor sent me up with another instructor was that because he thought I was ready to go solo. They were going to send me up on Friday if the weather conditions were going to be similar to those on Thursday. To my misfortune it wasn't but knowing that made me super happy about it as I felt I was ready to go solo. Nevertheless, I had the best time, met amazing instructors, learned so much and gained confidence and reassurance that this is what I want to do in my future.

In total I had 20 launches across the week with my longest flight being 26 minutes.

I am not stopping there; I am eager to gain more practice. Therefore, I have signed up to be a member at the Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club. I am looking forward to continuing my aviation journey and it is not too far from my accommodation for the year. Hopefully solo soon! (If the weather is on my side).



Lastly, I cannot thank The Honourable Company of Air Pilots enough as well as my sponsor RAF Charitable Trust for providing me with a once in a lifetime opportunity. I am extremely grateful for this experience and felt very humbled that I was given this chance. I thoroughly enjoyed it, gained confidence, skills and knowledge and made new friendships. I am now one small step closer to realising my dream I have had since being 8 years old.

I would also to thank my instructors for their amazing teaching and all the staff of the club- especially the chef for the delicious food we were treated to every day that kept us going when the weather was not on our sides. Thank you to Martin for presenting us with the certificates and for the lovely advice.



The picture on the left is me and my instructor Hanz- Werner. He is by far the most experienced glider pilot I have ever flown with. Hanz told me about his over 900km flights that he has covered in a glider in a single day. Not many people have flown that distance in a single day in a glider.

I would just like to add that I received this opportunity after my 4th application. The first 2 years I did not even make it to the interview stage. On my third application, I received an interview but did progress further. Finally, this year, I had a successful interview and made it. Do not be disheartened if you are not successful in the first time applying. Don't give up and don't stop believing! Keep improving your application and your skills and do not stop applying.