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RAF Charitable Trust gliding scholarship 2025

Back in January 2025, I went to a Pilot Careers event in London and came across the Honourable Company of Air Pilots' gliding scholarships. They explained how the scheme gives people a proper introduction to flying, with hands-on experience in gliders. Since I've always wanted to become an airline pilot, it felt like the right first step, so I applied. After an interview in April at Air Pilots' House, I was lucky enough to be offered a place on a course at the Midlands Gliding Club in August.

I arrived in Shropshire on Sunday 10 August. The drive up to the Long Mynd was steep and winding, climbing about 1,400 feet onto the plateau. The views across the valleys were incredible and gave me a first glimpse of the landscape we'd be flying over. Once at the club, I met the instructors and the other scholarship students, and we had a briefing about how the week would run. Everyone was welcoming, and it quickly felt like a good group to be part of.

From Monday we got straight into flying. We were lucky with the weather—most days were flyable, with a mix of thermals and ridge lift that gave us plenty of variety. Each morning started with preparing the gliders and a short briefing, then we rotated through launches, flights, and debriefs. Early flights focused on the basics: keeping the wings level, coordinated turns, and getting used to the feel of the glider. As the days went on, I was given more control and started to feel more confident.

Not everything went smoothly. The winch broke down twice midweek—once because a light aircraft flew underneath the cable and it had to be cut, and another time when the clutch wouldn't release. It was frustrating at the time, but it showed how important it is to stay patient and flexible in aviation. We used the downtime for ground school, covering things like weather, air law, and flight theory, which actually helped tie the practical side together.

Thursday was a highlight. The ridge lift was strong, so we spent time ridge running along the Long Mynd. Flying close to the slopes and using the rising air to stay up was a completely different experience, and it really showed how much the landscape shapes gliding. By then I was starting to anticipate how the glider would respond, rather than just reacting.

Towards the end of the week, the instructors let us try some aerobatics. I went through loops and steep dives, which were both exciting and a bit surreal—it gave me a new respect for how capable the gliders are. On Friday, the wind direction meant I had to land on a designated strip rather than the main field, which tested my circuit planning. My longest flight also came that day, about an hour and a half, just cruising around in calm air. It was incredibly relaxing and a great way to finish the course.

By the time I left on Friday evening, I felt I'd learned a huge amount. I'd gone from having no gliding experience to being able to handle the aircraft confidently, understand how weather affects flying, and work as part of a team on the airfield. The week had its challenges, but that made it more rewarding. Overall, the scholarship confirmed that flying is what I want to do, and it's given me skills and memories I'll carry forward as I work towards becoming an airline pilot. I'm really grateful to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for giving me the chance to take part—it was a brilliant opportunity, and I know it's set me up with a solid foundation for whatever comes next.







