

Ollie Isherwood Gliding Report

Honourable Company of Air Pilots Gliding Scholarship 2026

Never before has a week of “work experience” been so enjoyable. I had been looking forward to the week from the moment I received the acceptance email, and I can very gladly say it did not disappoint, far from it in fact. The whole experience held so much more than I anticipated, and I’m incredibly grateful to all those who made it happen. I will attempt to do it justice in this report, and hopefully provide some helpful insight to anyone looking to apply.

As an aspiring pilot with very few hours, gliding was the perfect way to start my training. For context, my journey with the HCAP Gliding Scholarship started over a year ago, where on my first application, I was unsuccessful after interview. Despite not being successful on that occasion, I left the interview with a clearer idea of what to expect, and some very useful advice and guidance from my interviewer. So even without the outcome I was hoping for, I still gained crucial experience from the process. For that reason I would recommend anyone to apply, even if they do not think they are ready just yet, because even being unsuccessful offers crucial experience which you can build on for future applications in any field. This has been my approach for the HCAP PPL scholarship, which I will be applying to for the third year running this year, as well as most of the Air League scholarships and, most optimistically, the British Airways Speedbird Academy. Despite being severely underqualified for several of these, I aim to build on my applications year on year, in hopes of eventually being successful.

With regards to the HCAP Gliding interview, I’m sure there are a few things I can share which might provide a little extra clarity for any future applicants. The first thing I would say is despite the significance of the interview and its outcome, it is not something you should be anxious about. Nerves are natural and for most people, including myself, unavoidable regardless of how prepared you may be. With that being said, as I mentioned earlier there is no negative outcome from this process: an unsuccessful interview is still a great learning opportunity. The interviewers, many of whom are past scholars and know what it feels like to be sat on the other side of the desk, do a great job of making you feel at ease, and made both of my interviews an opportunity for me to share my passion, rather than a barrage of difficult questions. The passion is ultimately what they are searching for, so go into it with an eagerness to share yours, and it will feel more like an interesting conversation with other like-minded people. The second pointer I would give is to make sure you have a good grasp of gliding as a whole. Personally, my ambition is to become a commercial pilot, so the majority of my knowledge stems from powered flight. Having an understanding of general flight theory is essential, but knowing glider-specific concepts such as the different types of launches and sources of lift displays a higher level of preparation and interest in gliding, which could help set you apart from other applicants. The final piece of advice I would offer is to ask questions. The interview is a rare chance to speak with people further along their journey in aviation, and I would implore anyone who gets through to interview to come with a few genuine questions in mind, to maximise what you get out of the process.

Now for an overview of the week. After a long drive up to the picturesque Peak District, I arrived at Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club. Perched upon a large plateau, DLGC is in the perfect place for gliding, as we soon learned on our tour of the club led by our instructor Pete “Greasy” Grey. With a long ridge which deflects oncoming wind upwards, and spots of rising warm air generated by the chimney of an old cement works in a neighbouring village, the surrounding landscape was often full of inviting prospects for a glider pilot. There were plenty of club members making the most of these as the sun began to set on the first day of our course, giving us plenty of action to observe as we toured the grounds. Having completed our circuit of the idyllic grounds, we returned to the hangar to find some tractors waiting for us. A keen petrolhead myself, the opportunity to be spending plenty of time at the wheel retrieving gliders came as a welcome surprise, and would prove to be one of the most enjoyable parts of the week, closely following the gliding of course. Having had our fun getting to grips with the tractors, it was time to settle down for our first meal of the week, provided by the talented chef John, with the help of the ever-cheerful Sylvia. Starting the week off with a classic fish and chips, any doubts regarding the food here were quickly put to bed as I tucked into a delicious homemade fillet of battered cod. Satisfied with my choice, dinner presented the perfect opportunity to get to know the rest of the scholars who I would be flying alongside for the week, who thankfully all turned out to be great company. Well-fed and with five new friends, it was time to get some rest for what we all hoped would be an action-packed first day.

After a great sleep and a filling English Breakfast, we were ready to get the first day of the course underway. Full of anticipation and eagerness, it was to my great relief that the conditions were perfect for getting up in the air. In groups of three we took turns gliding and retrieving, and my turn to fly couldn’t come soon enough. Never having done a winch launch before, I was excited to take a step into the unknown, and with Pete in the back seat, I knew there was nothing to worry about. No sooner had we closed the canopy were we a thousand feet above the airfield. The G-forces pushing me down into my seat were exhilarating, and I had to quickly remind myself that I was there to learn, and not merely enjoy the ride. From that moment on I was hooked, and knowing that I would be doing this over and over again for the next five days filled me with great excitement.

Each flight would build on the last, and I found myself growing in confidence, and becoming more at ease with the controls. My instructor Pete proved to be a fountain of wisdom, and whether we were in the cockpit, walking the glider back up to the launch point or sheltering from the rain in the launch bus, he always had some knowledge to impart. He would make predictions on the day’s weather based on the clouds in the sky at 09:00, and when we were watching another glider from the ground, he somehow managed to ascertain that the pilot had just trimmed for a certain speed. How he could possibly know that was beyond me, and as a result I did my best to absorb as much as I could, in hopes of one day being as knowledgeable as him. Pete knew many things like the back of his hand, which made you wonder how many hands he actually had. He played a huge part in giving me the best experience possible over the week, and I feel very fortunate to have met him and been instructed by him.

Pete was one of the many DLGC volunteers who were absolutely lovely. There were a number of instructors and members with us throughout the week, each with their own unique stories. It was interesting to learn how they had come to being at DLGC, some had careers in aviation

and simply couldn't get enough of it, while others used gliding as a way to make the most of their free time. Regardless of their background, they were all united by their love for gliding, and an enthusiasm to share that passion with others. All this made for a lovely community at DLGC, and whether it was out on the airfield or down in the bar after a long day of gliding, there were always smiles and stories going round.

Unfortunately the weather was not always in our favour, and while most bad weather passed through relatively quickly, we did not have the same luck on Thursday. Despite being grounded for the day, there was still plenty for us to do. We began with a talk from Pete on landing approaches, learning about key altitudes and positions at each stage of the pattern. We were then able to put what we had learned into practice on the impressive DLGC simulator, which was derived from a retired glider cockpit, giving us a very realistic experience. Despite varying levels of success in the simulator, that practice in a safe and controlled environment paid dividends when Pete started to hand the landings over to me on Friday. After lunch, Pete gave us another talk, this time on wave soaring, where he explained the theory behind it and shared some incredible pictures of himself and others doing it at tens of thousands of feet in the Scottish Highlands. Seeing those photos and hearing Pete's stories was very inspiring to me. As an engineering student, part of the reason I am so interested in aviation is the physics behind it, and seeing it so plainly in action was particularly fascinating.

Friday presented some of the best conditions that we'd had all week, allowing us to end the week on a high with plenty of time in the air. Armed with my knowledge of landing patterns from the previous day's learning, it was time to put that into practice for the first time. My objective for the final day was to be in control from launch to landing, with as little help provided as possible from Pete in the backseat. This was a daunting yet exciting prospect, and would be my first taste of almost solo flight. Aside from some slightly firm landings, I was able to launch, navigate the landing pattern and bring the glider down virtually independently, with only a few gentle reminders from Pete here and there. This was a big milestone for me, and I now feel confident that I could complete a flight unassisted, although whether Pete would agree is another matter! Nevertheless, that confidence has made gliding a much more accessible prospect in my mind, and as a result I will be joining my university gliding club this year, to work towards my first solo flight and eventually attaining my SPL.

I gained so much from the week, and not just skills in the cockpit. From learning how to drive a tractor, to developing a fascination for clouds, there is so much that I will be taking away. I feel incredibly grateful to have been awarded such an intensive and thorough training course, especially considering its timing. I have learnt in a week what would have otherwise taken months, and having developed a strong set of core skills, it is now much easier for me to go gliding once a week or so, and not feel like I'm starting from scratch each time. I want to thank the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for providing the gliding scholarship, and also my sponsor, the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust, for their generosity in funding my place on the course. I'd also like to thank Pete, John, Sylvia and all of the amazing people up at the DLGC for being so welcoming, and making the week so special. It was genuinely one of the most enjoyable weeks of my life, and the perfect way to start my journey in aviation.

