

Setareh Manouchehri

RAFCT Gliding Scholarship 2025 - Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre

Aviation has always been my passion, and my biggest dream is to become a commercial pilot one day. As a maths student, I've always been fascinated by how physics makes flying possible, and I felt that gliding would be a brilliant way to experience flight in its purest form. I had often heard people say that the best pilots are the ones who can glide, so when I came across the Honourable Company of Air Pilots scholarships, I didn't want to miss the chance to apply. I was absolutely overjoyed to be selected. The moment I found out, I felt both honoured and very excited. Sitting in a glider for the first time really was a dream come true.



The silence up there, with nothing but the air and the sky around me, was breathtaking. Knowing the aircraft was sustained just by physics, with no engine at all, felt amazing. One of the highlights for me was getting to try some aerobatics – it was both thrilling and slightly surreal, something I'll never forget.

The scholarship took place at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre, which is based on a military site, and that added a whole other layer to the week. Staying in the officers' mess gave us a small taste of military life, and in the evenings, we were fortunate to hear inspiring talks from serving and former pilots — from fast-jet and helicopter pilots to women who had achieved

incredible milestones in aviation. Their stories were very motivating and showed just how many different routes there are into flying.



Each day, we worked in small groups of four students, accompanied by two instructors. From 9 a.m. until late in the afternoon, we rotated between flying, running the airfield, and helping each other learn. I came away not only with flying experience but also with stronger teamwork and leadership skills, and a better understanding of what it means to work towards a shared goal. By the end of the week, I could launch, complete a circuit, and land with much more independence than I thought possible in such a short time.

The progress I made in both flying and confidence surprised me. I've also gained resilience and an even stronger determination to follow my dream of becoming a professional pilot. I'm very grateful to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for giving me this opportunity.





I'd also like to thank Course Manager Dave Howell, Chairman David Darsun, and instructors Richard Lovell-Bott and Nigel Smith at Portsmouth Naval Gliding Centre for their patience and encouragement throughout the week. Their support made the course not just educational, but also a lot of fun. This scholarship has been one of the best and most rewarding experiences of my life so far, and I'd honestly encourage any aspiring pilot to apply. It's given me new skills, great memories, and even more drive to keep moving forward in aviation.

