

AMBER BRITTLEBANK

The Royal Air Force Charitable Trust scholarship 2026

What an incredible week! Right from the get-go it was easy to get on with everyone, being a group of people with the same interests, even recognising familiar faces through mutual friends and shared experiences. Aviation truly is a small world.

We were based at the Middle Wallop Army Air Corps for the week, lucky enough to have our morning and evening meals in their officers' mess. This meant getting to dress up smart, eat alongside and network with people in the industry and to get a taste of military life.

The first two days of gliding were spent at the Middle Wallop airfield, this is where the Portsmouth Naval Gliding Club (PNGC), who were kindly hosting us, normally launch out of. Before this week, I had never even sat in a glider and was terrified at the prospect of being catapulted into the air – this soon became my favourite part of the experience and I eagerly awaited my next opportunity to be accelerated and pinned to my seat.

The first day was spent getting familiar with the aircraft and the feeling of gliding and soaring around in thermals – a nauseating feeling for some, I was lucky enough not to feel its effects.

We were placed into four syndicates for the week and assigned one glider, an ASK-21 with the registration LPV (dubbed the 'Little People's Vehicle') and two instructors, I had Lee and Sam, who had both been gliding since they were very young! I couldn't have asked for better instructors, both incredibly patient, clear and encouraging.



By day two I was already attempting landings, with progress moving much quicker than I had anticipated. All of the instructors were helpful and chatty, overflowing with fascinating stories about their own careers and a few about their ex-wives.

Having only ever flown powered aircraft with the University Air Squadron the change to gliders was a completely new challenge, requiring a different way of thinking about flying. It has definitely provided me with a huge transferrable skillset that I will bring back with me. We did also have the chance to get a flight in a powered glider – the Grob 109, which was incredibly helpful when learning approach attitudes.



From Day three onwards, we were moved to the nearby RAF Upavon airfield for the remainder of the week. Suddenly we had to think about how the circuit would be different and was useful in developing adaptability and helped us to truly understand what we were doing.

Most evenings, we were fortunate enough to have guest speakers come and chat to us in the mess. For a group of young people who were still very unsure about their futures, having people that were once in our shoes come and talk about their careers was inspiring and reassuring. The speakers included commercial, Army, Naval and RAF pilots, flying a range of helicopters, fast jets and multi-engine aircraft.

Each morning there would be a group briefing from the basic training syllabus, these were relaxed and interesting and the perfect time for questions, nicely setting us up for a day of flying. On the rare occasion when bad weather prevented us from flying, we got ahead with the theory learning all about stalls, circuit planning and airbrakes.

The week 'flew' by so quickly, there was rarely a moment we weren't doing or learning something new. There is a strong sense of teamwork and responsibility that comes with gliding. Whether it was the daily inspection, operating the winch launch or Glidex computer system, tugging gliders, cleaning them, walking the wing or hooking them up. Everyone was always eager to volunteer themselves whenever there was a job to be done. After a long exhausting day at the airfield, some of us would head to the pub with the volunteers for a drink and a chat, or some relaxed card games in the garden.



By the end of the week, I was flying the entire circuit, launch, soaring, approach and landing entirely by myself, with the instructor in the back just for reassurance. It felt so rewarding to see the tangible progress I had made. As an adrenaline junkie, my favourite part was getting to do some aerobatics in the glider, loops, spins and, my all-time favourite, some negative G.

At the end of the week, we had the opportunity to invite our friends and family up to the airfield to see the progress we had made and watch us flying in the gliders. The week ended with an awards ceremony where I was asked to make a short speech on behalf of the students, something also a little out of my comfort zone, but I felt honoured to have been chosen. The week wouldn't have been possible without HCAP and the huge volunteering effort from the instructors, ground crew and previous scholarship winners returning to play their part.



I am incredibly lucky that the PNGC is my closest gliding club and already plan to return on subsequent weekends to continue my training and aim to make it to solo. Moving forward, I hope to take this experience and transferable skillset with me to a future career in aviation.

A huge thank you to everyone who made this 'take off'.