

Holly Dolan – RAF Charitable Trust Gliding Scholarship, Dunstable

I was very nervous driving through the gates of Dunstable Gliding Club, but I was even more excited. So excited I couldn't sit still. I had been gliding with the Air Cadets twice before this scholarship and had absolutely loved it, so I decided there was nothing to lose. I gained one of the best experiences of my life by sending in that application and I have absolutely no doubts about that.



When I arrived at around 8 o'clock, I exchanged friendly nervous glances with the other students and wondered how the week was going to go. By the last night together, we were staying up late, talking and playing cards. I think I've made some friends that will stay with me for a long time.

On the first day, we started by getting a general airfield briefing and meeting the instructors we'd be with for the week. Then, we started getting the gliders out from the hangars, watching the instructors do their checks and towing them over with golf buggies that we were all so excited about having!

Our first day was getting towed up by an aerotow, which I had never done before. I sat there in disbelief at what was happening. I had only ever been up gliding with a winch and on a concrete runway, so all of this was an amazing experience to start with. In between the first flights of our scholarship, we started to get to know each other. There were 7 other people on the course, and we were all within two years of each other, so we had a lot in common to talk about. The gliding was absolutely incredible, and the people I was doing it with there made it even more special.



My instructor was a really lovely man called Mark, and I had an amazing time being taught by him for the whole week I was there. For the first flights of the first day, he talked me through everything and let me take a video of the aero tow! This is a photo of the take-off from the video.

For the rest of the scholarship, we had a lot of fun as a group retrieving each other's gliders when we landed with the buggies, congratulating great landings and just talking about the learning process we were going through together. We had so much fun talking about our days at lunch and in the evenings in the briefing room and laughing about everything that was going on.

This gliding scholarship was amazing, and I loved everything about it. The winch launching was more exciting than what I'd done before, and being able to be in control during the last ones by the last day was really fun.

In the middle of the scholarship, for my last flight of the day I launched into some rain, and my instructor used this opportunity to show me how quickly the conditions can change and how it affects the glider's performance. The air around us was affected by the rain clouds and so there was quite a bit of turbulence. Even still, Mark let me be in control for the approach and landing, only taking over quickly at the end just as we were touching down on the field due to a gust of wind that caught us both off guard. That flight was probably my favourite, and I couldn't get the massive grin off my face for a good ten minutes.

A close second favourite was my second to last ever flight. I was in control the whole time, and despite it being my first time doing a launch, it went pretty much perfectly. I felt really in sync with the glider and aware of the conditions. It was about a 7-minute flight and I loved every second, and to make it even better, I did the best landing of the whole week.

After the gliding was done for the day, we packed everything up and towed the gliders back to the hangar. We then had a quick briefing about the day and updated our flying logbooks. In the evenings we all hung out as a group since we got along so well. We went into the town on two of the evenings; for one we got pizza, sat in a park and talked together whilst we ate, and then for the other we bought presents for our instructors and made paper plate awards for each one – it's an air cadet tradition after a camp and since we all had that in common and really liked our instructors we did it, and they loved it!

Overall, I absolutely loved my scholarship. Not only did I learn how to glide, I also learnt about the air traffic control vehicle radio commands, pre-flight checks, how to inspect the glider every morning, and made some incredible friends that will hopefully be in my life for a long time. We're already looking into local gliding clubs to try to get more experience because we all loved it so much!

