

RAFCT Gliding Scholarship Report

My name is Toluwalola Opaleye and in 2024, I was successful enough to attend the HCAP Residential Gliding Scholarship Course program at Derbyshire and Lancashire Gliding Club. As an aspiring pilot, this course has been an invaluable step on the path to my goal. In a short, the experience was simply amazing. The club was situated in a micro-climate, atop a ridge in the Peak District with a fantastic view of the surroundings.



Soon after we arrived and had been given a tour of the club, we got given our first lesson: tractor driving. Although unexpected, it proved to be very useful skill in aiding with the transporting of the gliders themselves up and around the airfield. After the first night, we had breakfast and then got straight into taking the gliders out of the hanger, learning the pre-flight safety checks and then driving them up the airfield. Our first flight or two consisted of our instructor giving us an aerial tour of the airspace and run-through of controls and the systems in the aircraft. I think this was a much more effective way of learning how everything worked since you were fully immersed in the learning process.

In order to fly a glider, you need to know more than just how to control it; you need to learn how to get it off the ground safely and retrieve it once it has landed. During the week, we learnt everything from winch signals to towing them back up the hill safely even in high winds. We learnt about Dis (Daily Inspections) that covered everything from the aircraft to the parachutes. By the end of the course, we were able to completely set up a take-off (with hands-off supervision) and retrieve the glider unaided. We also learn the skills behind the puzzle that is moving the gliders in and out of the hangar, which we soon discovered that sometimes, less is in fact more. Due to the micro-climate that comes with the open airfield, we also learnt very quickly how to cope with the extremely changeable temperatures throughout the day; where it would be freezing on the ground on some days but would become a sauna up the sky on others.



Over the course of the week, we not only learnt how to move the aircraft forwards, but also how to gain height, speed and put the glider in the position to fly itself. The vast majority of the week was practical however there were some short diagram-aided theory lessons that was learn on the ground, for example, how the ridge helps the glider gain height, the most effective angle to fly a glider across a ridge and (of course) how to do all the safety checks effectively and efficiently. I think that the hands-on approach to learning was the best way for us to learn and develop our skills in such a short time, despite that fact that we all arrived with varying levels of flight experience, with some of us barely having touched the controls of a glider before. The fact that we were in group of 6, which was further split down to two group of 3 for each instructor, meant that we all got to gel well as a team and maximised our time as we all got the opportunity to take part in different stages of the gliding process. We were all able to take control of the glider for the whole flight and some of us even learnt how to do take-offs and landings with the help of our respective instructors.



The community and the gliding club were wonderful, as everyone from the instructors to the amazingly talented chef John were so welcoming and supportive. The instructors helped us push ourselves to be more confident and in control and we surprised ourselves in how quickly we learnt under their expert guidance. I genuinely believe that if we had another full week

(weather permitting) of gliding, we might have been ready to do some solo flights, despite our previous lack of experience. I can say that many of my skills, such as teamwork, critical communication and decision making and spatial awareness have drastically improved.

All in all, I want to say a huge thank you to everyone from the Honourable Company of Air Pilots who made this unforgettable experience possible, from the interviewers to the office administrators. Thank you to the other 5 who attended the course with me, the fact that I had so much fun largely came down to the mornings and evening we spent together, so thank you I hope we get to see each other again soon. Thank you to Hans, my instructor, who made the weekends the perfect mix of educational and enjoyable. Thank you to Sylvia and the team at the gliding club who supported us throughout the week and even set up the flight simulator when the weather was not on our side.

Thank you so much for this invaluable opportunity and I will never forget the amazing time I had.