

Kayla Witherall – RAFCT scholarship 2025

I applied for this scholarship after hearing about it during conversations with people within the industry at Gloucestershire airport where I was lucky enough to do some work experience. My interest in flying began with a helicopter flight on my 16th birthday, the experience as a whole and speaking with the pilot sparked an interest that has continued to lead me further into the amazing world that aviation is. Speaking with my Maths teacher at the time, who was previously a navigator for the RAF, about this newfound fascination for flying, led to a lot of encouragement to book a trial flight. After my trial lesson, my passion grew and I knew this was something I wanted to be involved in for life.

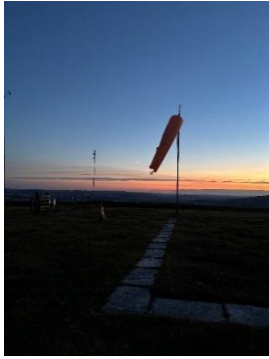
Since then, I have been lucky enough to complete ten hours of powered flight training after being selected for the Herefordshire Aero Club Young Aviator's Scholarship. In a bid to continue my flying, I applied for both the HCAP PPL and gliding scholarship, I was delighted to find out I had been successful for this gliding scholarship, and even more delighted by the end of the week spent gliding, truly such an amazing experience that I will never forget.

I arrived at Midland Gliding Club on the Sunday afternoon; I was warmly welcomed by some club members and began to learn about the workings of the club and about gliding itself as someone with no prior experience in gliding. I met some other people in my scholarship group, and we were able to see several launches and get introduced to some jobs such as hooking on gliders and wing running. I was also given the opportunity to learn and practise driving the buggies and Vitara's used by the club to retrieve gliders after landing. We helped pack up the hangar at the end of the day learning how to safely handle and position the gliders.

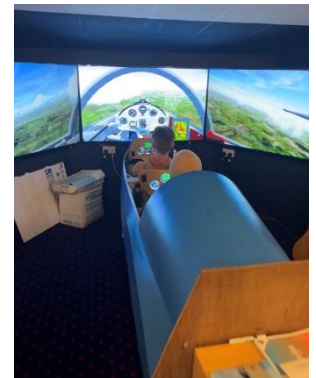
The next day was perfect weather for gliding and a great time for my first experience in a glider, I was able to get the hang of using thermals to gain height and had the best time on my second launch with a great soaring flight of 38 minutes. I had the privilege of flying with my instructor Matt Cook, a very talented instructor with many great aviation stories. I was introduced to two different types of stalls (mush and nose drop) which were great fun. Additionally, I was able to learn to drive the retrieve winch, this was a really great job to learn, it felt very rewarding as the retrieve winch driver plays an important role in the safe launching



of gliders, requiring good concentration and responsibility, it also gave the opportunity to practise using the radio to communicate with the main winch driver. Each night my group along with our instructors Matt and Sam enjoyed delicious food catered by the lovely Jess in the club house, full of great laughs, amazing sunset views and enriching stories from instructors and club members.



The following day, Tuesday, we were less lucky with the weather and unfortunately were not able to go out gliding. However, we had a great day with many informative theory briefings delivered by our instructor Sam, I learnt a lot more about circuit planning, landing and launching which really helped with my progress in the glider the following day. We were able to spend time in the club's simulator room which was great fun for practicing landing and launching, and enjoyed the scenery of Long Mynd on an afternoon walk.



The next day we continued to progress our gliding skills with most of the group independently controlling the launch and landing with little to no help from our instructors! It was great to see how quickly we were able to improve not only our individual skills when gliding but also our efficiency as a team. As we got used to each job involved in the running of the launch point, we were able to maximise our own time in the gliders as there was less time taken in preparation for the next launch due to an increase in our efficiency as a team, as communication skills and confidence in our agreed roles improved. These roles involved keeping the log, hooking on gliders, wing running, retrieve winch driving and retrieving gliders. This day the club ran an evening



session for members which we were able to help with and engage in some great conversations with experienced club members.



On Thursday, I learnt and mastered some more skills such as dealing with undershoot and overshoot on approach to land, balloon recovery and stall with wing drop. We practised many circuits and the skill of judging when to extend/shorten a circuit in order to approach the runway at a suitable height.

On Friday we took our final launches in the morning and had the opportunity to meet and introduce ourselves to some men and women involved in the HCAP scholarship and later attended a final debrief where we were congratulated and awarded our certificates.

This really was a life changing experience for me, and I would recommend it to anyone with any interest in flying. It taught me so much about the fundamentals of flight, allowed me to form great friendships and I cannot thank HCAP and Midland Gliding Club enough for such an amazing experience, and RAFCT for funding my scholarship.

