

Noah Barker – RAFCT Scholarship 2024

My name is Noah Barker, I'm 17 years old and I am currently studying A-Level Maths, Physics and BTEC Engineering. During the week commencing the 4th of August I attended Midland Gliding Club to have an experience that would last a lifetime and develop my aviation skills. I was awarded the Royal Air Force Charitable Trust Gliding Scholarship.

Before I attended the course, I had a personal goal to get to the level of Ghost Solo. I knew that there were several factors that might prevent me from achieving this, such as weather conditions and my own personal ability. But I was determined to give it my best effort.

After arriving on Sunday evening and getting to know my fellow course members, we arose on Monday morning to find the weather was not on our side. A low cloud base meant that flying was paused until approximately midday. However, we made use of our time and began learning new skills on the club's simulator. We commenced flying after a flight in a Motor glider, which I was fortunate enough to volunteer for, confirmed the cloud base had risen to a safe altitude. On the first day we all began rotating around the different duties that were involved in launching a glider. It was vital that we all became confident in these areas to insure we could have a smooth week of gliding, being efficient with our launches. This included: wing running, signalling, retrieve winch, towing and more, my personal favourite being herding the sheep off the airfield in the club vehicles.

The gliding instruction began with basics like demonstrating control surfaces of the gliders and demonstrating stalls. However, I soon moved on to circuits, understanding the different legs with their altitudes, speeds and bearings. This coincided with landing practise which I had been doing since my first launch, gradually increasing my independence with the responsibility of operating the air brakes.

With gliding being completely dictated by the weather, we did get quite lucky, with only one day being without any flights. Although we couldn't continue our training in the gliders, the instructors gave us a series of lectures covering topics such as: thermals, wave and circuits. We also had a careers talk with a club member who was an ex RAF and commercial pilot. We then had a competitive game of monopoly which seemed like it would never end. It was at this point when Kat Hodge joined us from the Honourable Company. It was really good to get a chance to speak to someone from the organisation

to understand more about how they operate the scholarship programmes, and to get advice from an experienced aviator.

On the final day of the scholarship, I was sad that it was coming to an end but eager to fly and demonstrate my progression one last time. After undertaking different roles in the morning to get gliders launched, it was my turn to fly the ASK-21. Before I sat in the glider I was told by my instructor, James, that I would be in control of the launch. As I sat in the glider, cable on and secure, I felt the nerves in my stomach. I knew this was the most dangerous few seconds of the flight, it was my responsibility. But before I even got a chance to think about it, it was over and we were soaring over the ridge. That final afternoon, I completed two ghost solos in the K-21, achieving my personal goal. After having two flights in the K-21 I also managed to have one final flight in the K-13. It was my first time flying with this instructor and I had informed him of my earlier launches and he put his trust in me to control the launch in the K-13. I was yet again nervous as in my mind this was a glider that I'd never sat in yet alone flown before, however it was another successful launch that I controlled. I enjoyed my last flight at the club and as we were last to launch, we weren't in a hurry to land. With the instructor I completed more stall executions and enjoyed flying in the purest form. With the instructor in control, we also undertook some ridge running, utilising the club's unique location and topography. I landed for the final time and assisted with the hanger pack.

I'm eternally grateful to the RAFCT who provided me with the means to build a strong foundation of flying skills that I hope to carry into future lessons and experiences. Looking towards the future, I am in the process of joining my local gliding club so that I can continue my development and retain what I had learned during my scholarship. I am also going to apply for further scholarships in an attempt to further expose myself to powered flight. It is also my goal to one day join the RAF and support the Charitable Trust just as how they have supported me. I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the organisation of the scholarship programme as it gave me and countless other young people with the means to begin our dream careers in aviation.