

Thomas Davies

The James Winspear Gliding Scholarship

My name is Tom and from a very young age I have had a huge passion for aviation. I can't pinpoint the exact moment that sparked my interest, but I know that since I took my first trial flight at the age of twelve, I have been determined to become a pilot. This year, I researched opportunities to develop my flying skills, and this was when I came across the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and their flying scholarships. I applied straight away, although I didn't expect to be fortunate enough to receive one.

After a challenging application process, I was absolutely thrilled to hear that I had been awarded one of the 2026 gliding scholarships, which was very generously sponsored by James Winspear. I was especially pleased to hear that I would be completing my scholarship at the Midland Gliding Club because I knew it would offer excellent opportunities to learn ridge soaring.



Quickly, the time came around for me to head up to the club, which meant a very exciting but daunting drive to the Shropshire countryside. When I arrived, everyone was so friendly and I was shown to my room and then given a tour of the clubhouse and the airfield. That evening we had a wonderful Sunday Roast cooked by Helen and had some downtime in the clubhouse to get to know each other. I know that I have made lifelong friends on the course and we are already planning to meet up again soon!

Over the course of the week, I had the opportunity to fly both the K-13 and the K-21 gliders. We used the K-13 at the start of the week to learn our basic flying skills and then moved over to the K-21 for better performance once a repair had been signed off. Both gliders are excellent for training in, and we had great

fun doing some aerobatics in the older K-21!

Over the course of the week, I managed to log ten launches with a total airtime of just under three hours, with my longest flight being one hour and ten minutes! We also had the chance to practice circuits, which led to me being able to fly from the top half of the launch to the landing by the end of the week. I couldn't believe how quickly I was able to progress and learn the art of soaring. This wouldn't have been at all possible without the

expertise of my instructors, Sam Prin and David Gorrell. I had no gliding experience at all prior to my week at the Long Mynd, so I can confidently say that they have taught me everything that I now know about gliding.

It wasn't just flying skills that I learnt though, ground operations were also a massive part of the week. We all took turns in different roles on the ground and learnt how to launch a glider safely and efficiently. Jobs included: wing running (to stop a wing striking the ground during the start of a launch), attaching the cable, keeping a log of the daily flights, and the launch director, who ensured everyone was working effectively.



We also had half a day where we unfortunately got rained off, but it didn't stop us from learning, as we took the time to have a lecture on topics such as circuits. I can say that this was so beneficial when it came to the practical flying as we already had a solid understanding of what to expect.



As the week drew to a close, it only left me wanting more. I know that I have developed numerous essential piloting skills over the week that will hopefully help me to pursue a career in the airlines. My week in the Shropshire mountains is an experience that I hope to look back on

further down the line when I have achieved my goal. I cannot wait to apply for the Honourable Company of Air Pilots PPL scholarships and the airline cadet programmes next year!

My advice would be that if you are thinking of applying, please do it! I can honestly say that this scholarship has given me a massive boost of confidence in my ambition to become a commercial pilot. Being surrounded by a group of aspiring pilots for a week really made me believe that my dream is not just a dream but is something that could actually be achievable for me.

I would like to say an enormous thank you to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for organising the course and to my sponsor, James Winspear, for



generously funding the course. I would also like to say a massive thank you to the Midland Gliding Club for hosting, the catering staff, the winch drivers, and of course my excellent instructors, Sam and David. I would also like to say a massive thank you to my wonderful coursemates and to anyone else who helped to make this week happen, I am forever grateful.

Thank you again,

Thomas Davies