

Annabelle Dowse

Air Pilots Visits Team Gliding Scholarship



In the summer of 2024, I was fortunate to receive a 6-day residential gliding scholarship by the Honourable Company of Air pilots, providing me with the opportunity to learn how to fly gliders at Midland Gliding Club from 4th-9th August.

This journey began with an interview in London in April 2024. Though nervous at first, I quickly felt at ease upon meeting the supportive interviewers and fellow candidates. The process itself was immensely rewarding as I knew that, irrespective of the outcome, the skills I gained would serve me well in future situations. However, just two weeks later, I was ecstatic to receive the news that I had been selected for this incredible opportunity!

This experience was nothing short of transformative. Arriving at the club, I was greeted by the sight of gliders soaring overhead, a thrilling introduction to the week ahead. We all arrived at the club early-afternoon on the Sunday prior to the week of gliding commenced, giving us time to familiarise ourselves with the airfield and get to know one another. As a first-time glider, I was initially apprehensive about what the week would entail. However, my initial anxieties quickly subsided as I met my fellow scholars, all of whom had little to no gliding experience too.

The day after we arrived, the weather didn't initially appear to be in our favour, not allowing us to fly until the afternoon. However, we were fortunate to still obtain 3.5/5 days of flying, allowing me to accrue 3 hours and 15 minutes of flight time, with one of my flights lasting for 1 hour and 11 minutes (a result of both ridge and thermals)! However, even when we were unable to get in the air, our time was filled with an abundance of other activities, from simulator work and lessons to playing games of monopoly and driving around in the clubs' cars.

My first-ever flight in a glider was anything but ordinary- a cable break shortly after launch, meaning the duration of my first flight was just 1 minute! While an unconventional start, it gave me invaluable insight into how unexpected challenges are managed in the air, reinforcing the importance of quick thinking and remaining calm under pressure.



A typical day at the airfield started around 8 a.m. with breakfast, followed by getting the gliders out of the hangar in preparation for the day ahead. Everyone had the opportunity to experience a mix of longer and shorter flights, allowing us to practice everything from in-flight operations to take-offs and landings. Yet, on days with good thermals, we certainly did make the most of the extended flight times, honing our skills of using both the rudder and stick whilst thermalling!

When not in the air, we rotated through various roles, such as wing-running, clearing the airfield of sheep, or keeping logs of flight times. Once the day's flying concluded and the gliders were returned to the hangar, we had free time before dinner. Some of our most common activities included utilising the clubs' gliding simulator and driving to the local woods to go for walks in the countryside.

Evenings were likewise relaxed, offering the opportunities to bond with fellow scholars.

Over the course of the week, I covered far more than anticipated, from solo landings and practicing high-speed stalls to managing over and undershooting and pre-flight checks. One of the most satisfying aspects of the course was seeing my progress reflected in my logbook (provided by the club), which was signed off nightly- each signature marking a step closer to flying solo.

However, the highlights of my experience do not stem solely from the gliding itself. I had the opportunity to fully immerse myself in airfield operations, whether that be from attaching strops to gliders, assisting with launch operations, or operating the retrieve winch, you would never find yourself bored on the airfield!

Likewise, the club's hospitality was exceptional, with Helen, the club chef, ensuring everyone's dietary requirements were catered to, and the instructors providing thorough, patient guidance, ensuring we always felt confident and well-supported.



I never realised how much I would love gliding, the tranquillity you experience when in the air without the noise of the engine is truly unparalleled. Following this extraordinary experience, I am determined to make the most of the foundation I have achieved and progress towards flying solo!

I really cannot thank the Air Pilots Visits Team, Honourable Company of Air Pilots, and Midland Gliding Club enough for providing me with this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, progressing my career into aviation and meeting a group of utterly amazing people who I'm sure I will remain in contact with for a long time. I would highly recommend to anyone considering applying for a scholarship to just go for it, you have absolutely nothing to lose and it is truly an amazing experience which I believe it has supported me on my journey in becoming an airline pilot and is something I will reminisce on fondly for years to come. Once again, thank you!

