

Tom Chidgey

Gliding Scholarship Report

During the Summer of 2024, I was honoured to receive a gliding scholarship from the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, funded by SkyDemon. Without a doubt, this was the most surreal and enjoyable week I have ever experienced; I cannot thank both SkyDemon and the Honourable Company of Air Pilots enough!

Before the week, I had little to no gliding experience. During my first year at the University of Bristol, I joined the gliding society where every other weekend I had a glimpse of what was yet to come! Unfortunately, I was limited by the financial barrier of gliding (although cheaper than powered flight), so instead I applied to join the committee of the society where I was able to get more involved in promoting the prospect of gliding to others. Around 3 months later, I received the unbelievable news of a fully-funded week of gliding – it still feels surreal to this day!



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On the 18th August I arrived at the Cotswold Gliding Club, welcomed by the most enthusiastic club members and instructors! I initially met Sam, my instructor for the week, who gave an outline of the course as well as making sure myself and the other scholarship winner were settled. Both Susi, the Office Manager, and Sam went above and beyond with not only the training but preparing and cooking our meals the entire trip. From homemade curries to barbeques in the sun, we even had the opportunity to get stuck in and help cook!

On the first day, we were introduced to principles of flight, understanding how to effectively turn the glider and practicing the pre-flight checklist. As well as this, we learnt the basics of ground handling: preparing and signalling the gliders for launch, communicating over the radio and operating from the launch location to signal to the winch driver. By the end of the day, the other scholar, Oliver, and I found ourselves working as a team to safely launch every flight! It is a rapid progression of responsibility, however there was always an abundance of help and support if we ever had any questions or concerns.



Throughout the whole week, we experienced high winds which made the experience far more interesting! We did use this to our advantage as we found ourselves alone on the airfield which allowed for more flights and effective retrievals. We had access to their purpose-built gliding simulator at any point within the course too! After getting more comfortable with turns, Sam progressed us onto supervised approaches and winch launches. To have that responsibility so early on the course was extremely motivating, especially given the weather conditions.



Quite a memorable experience was stall practise, we were able to cover each stall within the syllabus (we received a progress booklet which enables instructors to safely review our confidence in each aspect of flight, which is extremely useful if/when transferring gliding clubs), followed by a debrief of why it occurred and what we did to correct it whilst on the ground. It was extremely important to learn the secondary effects of controls so that we could understand why the stall occurred. On top of this, Sam introduced us to aerobatics including loops, where we had an opportunity to conduct one ourselves!

By the end of the week, I completed a monitored flight without support (unless asked/needed for), which ranged from flying the winch launch to planning the circuit and completing the landing, although I did need a couple corrections which has allowed me to understand where my areas of improvement are. The most difficult part of the course was adapting to the importance of little adjustments when it came to flying, rather than over corrections which could massively affect each part of the flight. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity as it really boosted my confidence for the potential of completing a solo flight in the near future.



On the final day, we had the honour to meet Tricia, from the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, to ask about our experience. I am extremely grateful for the company for creating an enjoyable and at-ease recruitment process, followed by organising one of the best experiences of my life!

I would like to extend a special thank you to the Cotswold Gliding Club, in particular my instructor, Sam. I could not have asked for a better instructor to introduce me to gliding. Sam ensured that I understood each concept within our flights, and continuously cleared any ambiguity or uncertainty that I had. Thank you!



I would highly recommend applying to the HCAP scholarships. Not only is it a brilliant week away, but it builds on your aviation experience. Personally, this scholarship has been a unique talking point throughout the extremely competitive airline cadet scheme interviews as it demonstrates your motivation within the industry. If you are not successful initially, it is never a bad thing, I have applied to numerous scholarships and received rejections. The aviation industry is all about perseverance!