

## About Volunteering in British Gliding Clubs

Although usually a 'solo' sport, when in the air, gliding is a cooperative team sport. Why? Because for one person to get airborne, three or more others have to help launch them. The equipment, aircraft, buildings and airfield need to be prepared too. Largely, all this is done by volunteers.

Gliding in the UK is underpinned by a long established tradition of volunteering. Most gliding clubs operate on a not-for-profit basis and are run almost entirely by their members. This model of shared contribution plays a vital role in making the sport accessible & affordable, sustainable, and rooted in community. The volunteering culture is part of what makes gliding special.

### How clubs operate

British gliding clubs are not commercial flying schools. Instead of employing staff to provide the sports facilities and manage daily operations, most clubs rely on the time, skills, and goodwill of their members. This includes everything from launching and maintaining gliders to managing club finances, events, and infrastructure.

Each club is different, but the shared principle is the same: gliding happens because members make it happen.

### Why volunteering matters

The volunteer-led structure brings multiple benefits:

- **Affordability:** keeping membership and flying costs as low as possible
- **Ownership:** giving members a say in how their club is run
- **Community:** building strong social bonds between people of all backgrounds and ages
- **Sustainability:** ensuring the club can operate longterm, even in changing circumstances

It also reflects the cooperative spirit at the heart of the sport.

### The range of roles

Volunteering in gliding clubs covers a broad spectrum, including:

- **Flying operations:** instructing & coaching, tug flying, winch driving, launch point coordination, safety management
- **Technical and maintenance:** aircraft maintenance, vehicle servicing, workshop projects, building and airfield maintenance
- **Building and infrastructure:** building, plumbing, painting, woodwork, digger driving, tractor & mower driving
- **Club management:** finance, governance, membership administration
- **Support and hospitality:** event organisation, catering, communications
- **Supporting flying operations:** gathering and analysing pre-flight information for pre-flight briefings; setting flight tasks
- **Competitions:** organising competitions at the site, might include the club ladder; inter-club league; regional and national level contests

Some members contribute specialist expertise; others simply offer their time and enthusiasm. Clubs benefit from both.

## **Two sorts of volunteering**

Some volunteering is planned and scheduled, such as instructing, aircraft / vehicle / building maintenance, cutting the grass on the airfield, club management meetings or serving on the duty rota. These roles usually require someone to come to the club specifically to volunteer.

Other contributions are incidental, happening informally when a member is already at the club. For example, helping to launch and retrieve gliders, cutting the grass around the clubhouse, or doing small maintenance jobs on a non-flying day.

Both kinds of volunteering matter, and clubs depend on a mixture of the two.

## **Terminology**

Curiously, it is rare for a gliding volunteer to call themselves that. They either hold a named role, one that they can introduce themselves as e.g. 'I am an instructor', or they are helping out. This broadly reflects the same pattern as the two sorts of volunteering.

## **A collaborative culture**

Volunteering is not only how clubs function, it shapes their culture. This voluntary culture helps members build confidence, learn new skills, and develop a deeper connection to their club. Most people start by helping out informally and build their involvement over time.

This model creates clubs that are not just places to fly, but communities that thrive through shared effort.

## **In Summary**

Volunteering is what makes British gliding possible. It keeps clubs running, connects members to one another, and ensures that the sport remains accessible and affordable.

Every contribution matters, whether it's formal, informal, technical, social, practical, large or small. It's this shared effort that makes gliding more than a sport; it makes it a community.