

From HMC Scholar to the youngest Governor in Dollar's history



The HMC projects scholarship programme offers students from Central and Eastern Europe the opportunity to study for two years in a UK School. This programme aims to foster bonds of understanding and friendship between young people across Europe and provide an enriching experience for students. Karolina Pavlikova (FP2022) came to Dollar in 2020 as an HMC Projects Scholar. This is her story.

Karolina grew up in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. By her own account, she was never the kind of student who stuck to one thing; at school she tried sports and languages, and did various volunteering roles. She'd been exposed to British culture through TV since childhood, and had been learning English since she was two years old.

She almost didn't apply to the HMC Scholar programme. Three days before the deadline, a friend mentioned she was putting in an application. "I decided, let's just give it a try," Karolina recalls. The selection interview took place in January 2020. Two months later, the world changed. "One day we were at school. The next day we were told to go home, quarantine, stay home, don't come to school" she says. In that first, disorienting week of the COVID lockdown, the scholarship offer arrived.

"Coming to Dollar was the opportunity for a new adventure, it changed my life."

The Dollar adventure began in Argyll Boarding House which soon became "like a large family". What she found extraordinary was the breadth of opportunity available at Dollar. In Slovakia, her school had less than ten clubs. At Dollar the options seemed endless - she did beekeeping, running, completed her Gold Duke of Edinburgh, was cast in the school musical, and simply said yes to everything on offer.



"...on Tuesday I could be walking an alpaca around the campus, on Wednesday at a rugby match at Murrayfield, and then surfing with the Surf Club on Thursday."

Karolina has known she wanted to be an architect since she was nine years old. But the path to architecture school is specific: it typically requires physics and art, and a portfolio of creative work. In Slovakia, the curriculum structure made this subject combination impossible, which would have created problems for UK university applications. At Dollar, she could take both.

"The teachers were really, really helpful. They knew what I needed to put in my portfolio, guided me to improve my skills in areas they thought I could develop. [...] Without Dollar, I would have had no portfolio, and I would not have been able to apply to architecture."

Karolina left Dollar in 2022 and has recently graduated from her MA Architecture degree at the University of Edinburgh. Since leaving Dollar she's watched from afar as the school's developed. She saw the announcement that Dollar was looking for a new governor. She applied. She was offered a place on a waiting list. In August 2025, more than a year later, the school came back to her. In November 2025 she was appointed to the Board of Governors. She is the youngest governor in Dollar Academy's history, and as the youngest governor, and a former pupil, she brings a unique perspective.

"I can represent the pupils who are there now; I understand their experience."

She attends three meetings a year, each one providing a reason to return to Dollar, walk the campus, and watch as the new FIDA building takes shape. The school she once arrived at in the middle of a pandemic is still, she says simply, her home, and she is delighted to be able to give back.

"The HMC Projects Scholarship is a really unique opportunity, and it is changing lives. For pupils from Eastern Europe, especially, this is something they would never have thought possible. To come to the UK, to come to Scotland, to come to a school like Dollar."

You can find out more about the HMC Projects Scholarship programme [here](#).