

The Stelios Philanthropic Foundation Scholarship 2025

Aaron George

I still can't believe how far this journey has taken me. This Scholarship has truly been a dream come true. What once felt like a distant ambition, sparked by watching aircraft climb out of Heathrow as a child and through yearly holidays to India, has now become something I have lived and experienced from inside a flight deck. Looking back, I still can't quite believe it!



My love for aviation began long before I ever stepped foot in an aircraft. Growing up close to major aerodromes, I would watch planes soar overhead, feeling a rush of excitement every single time. The idea that we can sit in a cockpit and, with just our human hands, fly these huge, beautiful aircraft filled me with awe. Even as a child, I knew that flying wasn't just something I enjoyed watching, I knew it was what I was called to do.

My first real step into aviation came through the Royal Air Force Air Cadets. I still vividly remember that first flight in the Grob Tutor at MoD Boscombe Down. The moment the gears lifted off the runway, everything changed. With the hum of the propeller, the ground fell away, and suddenly I was seeing the world from a perspective I had only dreamed of. That feeling stayed with me long after we landed. It lit a fire that has never gone out.



From then on, I grabbed every opportunity I could to get one step closer to the flight deck. I completed the Honourable Company of Air Pilots' Gliding Scholarship, continued gliding with the Air Cadets, and eventually achieved my solo in the Viking T1 glider. Alongside flying, I exposed and threw myself into every aviation experience possible: flight simulators, events, and opportunities with British Airways, Fantasy Wings, Boeing and many more. Each experience building and pushing me that one step closer to my dream of becoming a commercial pilot.

So, when I finally became old enough to apply for the Honourable Company of Air Pilots PPL Scholarship, there was no hesitation. The excitement of finding out I had made it through to the next stage, recording a short video introducing myself, and then being invited to interview at Air Pilots House in London, I was absolutely thrilled and determined to make the most of the opportunity. Then came around the day of the interview, bringing a mixture of nerves and excitement. I knew how much this meant to me, how it would bring me so much closer to the flight deck, and I wanted to give it everything.



From the moment I arrived, the Honourable Company did everything to make me feel at ease. What I thought would be a formal interview quickly turned into an inspiring conversation about goals, experiences, and our shared passion for aviation. It was great to meet many with a



passion for aviation and listen to each other's journeys so far. Even so, I felt positive, but convinced that I had not done enough, thinking I could have done better and wishing I had said more.

The next day, during my lunch at school, I received the call from Ben, one of my interviewers. I had just come out of Mass when I heard the words I will never forget. I had been awarded the Honourable Company of Air Pilots Private Pilot Licence Scholarship for 2025. I was

speechless and shocked, and I only remember replying thank you about 100 times on the call, and I just couldn't believe and process that this was really happening. Knowing that I would overcome that initial hurdle to go commercial, I promised myself that I would make the most of every single flying hour, to take this amazing opportunity make the most out of it, and to help and inspire others along the way. I was extremely excited for what was going to be the best summer of my life, a summer of flying.



After completing my Year 12 exams, I began my flight training on 8th July with Flight Training London at Elstree Aerodrome, stepping into the Cessna 152 for the first time. The moment I had been working towards for so long was finally happening.



The first phase of training focused on the basics: general handling, climbing, descending, turning, and stalling, before moving onto circuits. Elstree's circuit was demanding due to noise abatement procedures, and it was challenging, but with persistence and confidence I kept going. On 1st August, after quite a few lessons of hard work, something I had dreamed of for years became

reality. I went solo. Being entrusted with a powered aircraft, and taking off alone was one of my proudest moments. Lifting off the runway, in G-CMRC as pilot in command was thrilling and emotional. It was the point where all the preparation, early mornings, and determination started to truly pay off, a day I will never forget.

From that point, everything progressed rapidly. I moved on to navigation, emergency procedures, forced landings, basic instrument flying, and learning to track and locate my position using VORs. Flying in the busy and complex airspace around Elstree, with Luton ahead, Heathrow behind, and Stansted to the right, it was challenging but incredibly exciting. Just knowing I shared the skies with the very jets I hope to fly one day filled me with awe and motivation.



Navigation lessons began with shorter routes to Oakley and Silverstone, before stretching to Rochester, Wellesbourne, and Duxford. One highlight was transiting Luton's Class D airspace.



Flying alongside commercial jets, the aircrafts I had admired for so long was an unforgettable feeling that made the dream feel even more alive.

On 8th September, I completed my first solo navigation flight to Duxford, an iconic and historic airfield. It was a busy day, and I had to go around twice for ex-military traffic, warbirds, in the circuit. Handling those situations calmly and professionally made me feel like a real pilot, able to adapt and make decisions in the moment.

One of the most memorable milestones of the scholarship came on 19th September: my qualifying cross-country. My route was Elstree → Wellesbourne Mountford → Duxford → Elstree.

Flying solo for over three hours and covering 175nm felt like truly living the life of a commercial pilot. Bringing G-CDTX safely home to Elstree filled me with pride and a sense of freedom I cannot describe. It slowly confirmed that I was ready for the Skills Test.

Alongside all the flying, I was working hard on my PPL theory exams. I set myself the goal of completing one exam per week to stay on track, while also preparing for the FRTOL. As my radio confidence grew, I noticed it reflected in my flying too. Learning the foundations of flying, the knowledge that will one day support a commercial career was fascinating and inspiring. It made me even more excited for the future, knowing that this was just the beginning of everything I hope to learn.



Finally came the day of my skills test. After all the flying, exams, FRTOL, navigations, cross-country, and all the preparation, it all came down to this final hurdle. I arrived fully prepared, with mass and balance calculations, a weather and NOTAM brief, performance calculations and the PLOG for the route: Elstree → Alconbury → Shotteswell/Banbury → Elstree.



Over Northampton, my examiner asked me to divert to Little Horwood. I calculated the new heading and ETA and located the airfield on time. We then completed general handling exercises, including stalling, steep turns, spiral dive recovery, and a simulated forced landing, before returning to Elstree for circuits: full performance, touch-and-go, glide, and flapless landings.

Once we touched down, I felt calm and confident. I covered up G-CDTX, knowing it would be my last flight for a little while, and I felt incredibly grateful for everything that had led me to that moment. When I walked back into the flight school, my examiner shook my hand and told me I had



passed. I couldn't stop smiling. I still can't quite believe it. I am actually a pilot now. Everything I have ever wanted is slowly coming together, and I can't wait for what the future holds.

Top Tips for PPL Students:

- 1) Prepare thoroughly for every flight:
Knowing your weather, NOTAMs, mass and balance, and route planning makes a huge difference. Being prepared allows you to focus on flying rather than catching up in the cockpit. Good preparation builds confidence and makes each lesson more productive.
- 2) Ask questions:
Your instructors and examiners want you to succeed. One simple question can often make everything suddenly click, turning confusion into clarity and making flying more enjoyable and safer.
- 3) Stay calm, resilient, and persevere:
There will be challenging moments, diversions, crosswinds, heavy radio work and many more, but stay calm and rely on what you have learnt turns them into valuable experience. Confidence grows with every flight. Mistakes aren't failures. They are part of becoming a competent pilot.



Looking ahead, now that I hold my PPL, I am excited to share this achievement with the people who supported me, taking my family and friends up and showing firsthand what their belief in me has helped achieve. This year, I plan to take the next major step by applying for airline programmes and scholarships, including BA Speedbird Pilot Academy, TUI MPL Cadet Scheme, Jet2 and Aer Lingus.

I am also passionate about giving back. As an NCO within the RAF Air Cadets, I help cadets, but I want to expand this further speaking at schools, career fairs, and aviation events to help others see that becoming a pilot is achievable. My goal is not only to progress in my own flying career, but to inspire the next generation to pursue theirs. If anyone wants advice or support in aviation, please feel free to reach out. I'd be more than happy to, and I will do my best to help.

I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt thanks to The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for awarding me this PPL Scholarship. This opportunity has truly been life changing, and I am so grateful for the guidance and support I received throughout. A special thank you goes to my Buddy, Tyler, whose advice and encouragement kept me focused and motivated. Having someone who believed in me and to talk to, made a huge difference.



A huge thank you also goes to Flight Training London especially Ivan, Tamsyn, Chris, Jerrick and the entire FTL team. Your dedication and support allowed me to develop my skills, confidence, and love for flying even further. Every lesson, briefing, and piece of advice played a vital role in shaping me as a pilot, and I am truly grateful for everything.



I am immensely grateful to the Stelios Philanthropic Foundation for funding this scholarship. Your generosity made it possible for me to pursue a dream I had held since childhood turning the passion I had for years into something I could live and experience. This opportunity has truly changed the path of my aviation journey, and I just want to say the biggest thank you.



Finally, I want to thank my family, friends, and everyone who has supported and believed in me throughout this journey. Your encouragement and faith gave me the confidence to keep pushing forward, even when things felt challenging. Especially to my family, from cheering me on, to listening to me talk about aviation endlessly, and celebrating every milestone along the way you have been an integral part of my success. This

achievement is as much yours as it is mine. Thank You.

Looking back now, I still can't wrap my head around everything that has happened. What started as a childhood dream, watching aircraft soar out of Heathrow and staring out of cabin windows on holidays, has somehow turned into my reality. I have gone from imagining what it would feel like to fly an aircraft, to actually sitting in the cockpit, taking off, navigating across the country, and landing on my own.



There were moments along the way where it felt impossible, too big, too far away, but step by step, lesson by lesson, it all came together. Passing my Skills Test and holding my PPL still feels unreal. I catch myself thinking, How have I actually done this?

This journey has been challenging, emotional, and without doubt one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. It has shown me what passion, hard work, and the support of the people around me can truly achieve. And now, standing at the end of this chapter, I feel incredibly grateful, proud, and more driven than ever for the future that lies ahead.



But more than anything, I hope my story shows others that this dream is possible. You don't have to come from a flying family or have everything

figured out from the start. If you love aviation, if you are willing to put in the effort, ask questions, keep going after setbacks, and take every opportunity that comes your way, you can get there.

If a kid who used to watch planes from Heathrow can one day fly solo across the country, then so can you. Your journey might look different, it might take time, but don't let that spark fade. Hold onto it, work for it, and one day you'll look back just like I am now, wondering how the dream became real. Take that first step, embrace every challenge, and keep your eyes on the skies. Your journey starts now!

Thank You,

Aaron George

