

Lane-Burselem (BALPA) PPL Scholarship 2022

Will Cooper

I put in my application for the Scholarship back in February, always hopeful but not feeling very confident. After being shortlisted and submitting my one minute video I was invited to interview and assessment. This while on study leave for my Advanced Higher exams was a very welcome distraction from exam preparation.

On the morning of the interview I caught the red eye down from Aberdeen, and looking back the fact that I got the chance to speak to the pilots at the end of the flight was perhaps a good omen that today was going to be a good one. Not only did it help calm my nerves but was really insightful especially as the co-pilot had not long finished his training and was very happy to share his experience. Next task was to find a café, have breakfast and look over some notes whilst I waited for my interview and assessment.



From minute one of arriving at the Air Pilots House the atmosphere was welcoming and relaxed. Angie and Liam kept us right and it was great to meet some of the other candidates – so many likeminded people. I was surprised at how enjoyable my interview with Kat and Chris was, while the mental dexterity test was as challenging as I expected. Only a few days later, in the thick of maths revision, I took a look at my emails and was delighted to discover I had been awarded the scholarship so promptly booked a Class 2 medical.



Training with Alex Air at Aberdeen airport started in early June. It was great to fly out of a busy airport with lots of helicopter traffic. Being in controlled airspace I was thrown in the deep end with R/T. I did my circuit training at Perth Airport and Longside airfield where I was sent on my first powered solo. It felt weird taxiing out without my instructor but once I was flying there was many other things to be thinking about; after my 13 minutes solo we headed back to Aberdeen. I did my solo circuits at a range of airfields; most notably was Dornoch which is small grass airfield beside the Tain range. It was amazing seeing all the targets and craters from military aircraft testing weapons. It reminded me of watching the TV series "Fighter Pilot" when I was younger.

In July I moved onto solo navigation which was my favourite part of the course. The thrill you get to think you have just piloted an aircraft

150nm is unbeatable. Once I had sat my FRTOL exam I was ready for my Qualifying Cross Country. This made for some of the most challenging flying I had done on the course. I had to deal with a diversion due to not being allowed through the Leuchars ATZ. When approaching Perth I was given the wrong runway in use by the A/G operator and I ended up joining the incorrect runway. I had to deal with this by positioning myself on the dead side of the correct runway in use to avoid conflict with other aircraft and joining crosswind. Although it was very stressful at the time, it has given me valuable experience.



RAF Lossiemouth



Each year a few football fields are opened up in Montrose in recognition of the former Montrose Air Station. This is where the Royal Flying Corps was formed. I was fortunate to fly into it after a radio navigation exercise and meet my Dad there. This was a fantastic experience and a real insight into what's to come with my PPL.

Due to examiner availability and Scottish weather I had 2 weeks between my mock skills test and the real thing which allowed me more time to become nervous. Following wonderful advice from Kat, I arranged to go passenger flying with a friend from my local flying club, which kept my head in the game and calmed my nerves. After 9 theory exams, an R/T exam and 45hrs

flying I was ready to sit my Skills Test. My navigation route was from Aberdeen to Banchory and then to the distillery at Dufftown (no they don't brew duff beer there but it is home to 6 distilleries with capacity to make 38 million litres of pure alcohol per year - over 10% of the overall capacity of the industry). We carried out the general handling up near Banff and went into Longside airfield for circuits which was quite challenging with a strong crosswind. I was thrilled to be told I had passed once we had shut down.

This summer has been extraordinary. I have had the chance to fly into 8 different airfields during my PPL and gain lots of different flying experience. Although very busy at times, every moment was brilliant. I have been able to achieve a dream that I never thought would be possible, with the help of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, the BALPA Benevolent Fund and my instructor Alex Guild.

I now plan on building my hours and potentially start flying the tug at my gliding club while applying to the military to become a pilot.



Insch Airfield



Runway 16 at Aberdeen