

Robert Harris

Sir Sefton Brancker PPL Scholarship 2022



My first flight in a Grob Tutor.

I will always remember the first time I was taken up in a light aircraft. It was in a Grob Tutor out of RAF Leeming. When I landed, I just couldn't put into words how amazing it was. I have always had a love for aviation but, from that point onwards, I couldn't stop thinking about the next time I would be in the air! As da Vinci once said, "once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward. For there you have been, and there you will always long to return."

I joined the Air Cadets whilst in school and applied for various scholarships along the way. I was very lucky to receive a gliding scholarship from the Fleet Air Arm Officers Association and was successful in my application for an ACPS, however, unfortunately this was cancelled due to COVID. My sights were now set on

achieving the first rung in the commercial ladder – my PPL. Alongside working as a full-time teaching assistant, I started my PPL training with Advanced Flight Training at Sherburn Aero Club.

In January 2021 I applied for a PPL scholarship with the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. A few weeks later I was told I had been shortlisted for the final stages of the application process and was asked to submit a short video about myself (recording the video took much longer than it should have done!). Next thing I knew I was invited down to London for an interview with Chris and Kat. Six days later I received an email from Air Pilots, I opened it within minutes of it arriving. I couldn't quite believe what I was reading when I saw the word 'Congratulations!' in red. This is a moment I will never forget. Little did I know, what an amazing summer I was about to have.

I commenced my training at Teesside international airport with Eden flight training on the 21st July. It was a great feeling to be back in the air again, however, one of the hardest things to get used to was the radiotelephony and operating procedures at Teesside (which had full ATC) compared to Sherburn (which was air/ground communication). Initially I never thought I would get used to the RT, but with a few flights in the bag I soon got a grip of it. With the help of my previous flying experience at Sherburn, it didn't take long until I was ready to complete the first milestone of the PPL – going solo! It was a surreal feeling taking off for the first time by myself. It felt slightly strange looking over to my right and seeing an empty seat, but at the same time it was incredible to think that I was the only one in control of the aircraft.



Just after my first solo flight!



*Teesside's runway lights just before official night time.
An incredible sunset that evening!*

Having completed the majority of the solo consolation, I swiftly moved onto phase two of the PPL - navigation. It was strange navigating from the air as everything looked so different! Once I was confident navigating via a chart, completing en-route checks and re-joining Teesside's controlled airspace I completed two solo navs. The first one was 'The Northern Route' which included Barnard Castle, Durham, Seaham and Hartlepool. The second one was south of the aerodrome from Stokesley to Whitby to Saltburn and back to Stokesley (a very picturesque route up the coast).

Before I knew it, I was at the final stage of training. Having passed all nine theoretical exams, I was able to start working towards my qualifying cross-country. The route was from Teesside to Humberside to Leeds East then back to Teesside. After having completed it initially with my flying instructor and waiting for a few days of bad weather to pass, I was finally able to tick it off. I couldn't have asked for better weather on the day and I even got to watch some aerobatic training at Leeds East! The trickiest part of the QXC was joining Leeds East uncontrolled airfield, it's much harder when you're not being told specific instructions...



*G-BOXC at Humberside on the first leg of my QXC
(stunning weather!).*

Prior to completing my skills test I had to fly just over an hour solo allowing me to meet the 10hr solo time required for the test itself. I couldn't quite believe it that only a month or two after starting training, there I was, nervously going through some last-minute mass and balance calculations whilst waiting for my examiner to walk in. My examiner put me at ease at once. The next thing I knew I was up in the air planning the diversion I was given, performing steep turns and practice forced landing, before completing a variety of circuits to finally coming into land. This was probably one of the best flights of my training. To my relief, I had passed with flying colours!



Absolutely over the moon after just passing my skills test.

As expected, this was the most amazing summer. I was able to achieve so much in such a short amount of time but of course, these things don't just happen by themselves. I would like to thank everyone at Eden Flight training for their support throughout my training and, in particular, my flying instructors Dale Murphy and Simon Johnston. I wouldn't be in the position I am now if it wasn't for their professional approach to delivering flying training.

Lastly, I would like to thank everyone at The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for making this amazing opportunity happen and for funding the Sir Sefton Brancker scholarship. They have been excellent throughout the whole scholarship, from the initial application to the administration. I would also like to thank Liam Bennett who was to be assigned my "buddy". Liam has been excellent to chat to whenever I have had any questions. This scholarship has meant so much to me. It has provided me with a sound foundation to an aviation career and has boosted my journey to become a commercial pilot. I would highly commend applying for this scholarship to anyone who is thinking about a career in aviation.