

The Stelios Philanthropic Foundation Flight Instructor Scholarship 2025

Priyanka Gandhi

An introduction to my career:



From the moment I sat in the cockpit at the age of seven, I knew aviation was going to be my career. Since I could remember, I used to fly regularly to India to visit my grandparents and all those journeys I have always had the urge to fly again and again. Eventually at age 7 I sat in the cockpit and was introduced the cockpit and that's when I decided Oh Yes! That's the career...

That spark led me to join the Air Cadets in 2014, where I rose to Cadet Warrant Officer and gained invaluable leadership experience, flight opportunities, multiple qualifications, and a deeper passion for flying throughout my years of being there. My journey took flight with my first controls of the Grob Tutor and unforgettable rides in Puma and Chinook helicopters.



In 2016, I was fortunate to take part in one of the Fly2Help Aim High Programmes and I won my first scholarship! Winning the William Sharpe Scholarship through them further fuelled my ambition and set me on a professional path. I used that money towards my first few hours.

In 2019, while starting a degree in Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Licence at Buckinghamshire New University (BNU), I also began my PPL training. Despite setbacks during the pandemic, I achieved my PPL in 2021 and continued with ATPL theory at Leading Edge Aviation later that year.



Over the next few years, I earned my IR(R), CPL, SEIR, completed my hour building and graduated from BNU, all while working as a flight attendant with easyJet, gaining a new appreciation for the airline industry.



In 2025, I was honoured with the HCAP Flying Instructor Scholarship...

My Flight Instructor Course Experience:

Undertaking my Flight Instructor Course at The Pilot Centre was one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences of my aviation journey. I thoroughly enjoyed every part of the process, not only because it represented a new challenge but also because it was a completely unique and different experience compared to my previous flight training. Becoming an instructor required me to shift my mindset from being the student to becoming the teacher, and while it wasn't always easy, it was incredibly fulfilling.

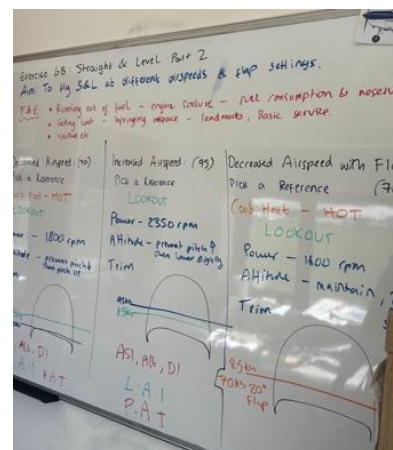


From the very first lesson, I knew this course would push me outside of my comfort zone. I quickly realised that flying from the right-hand seat was an entirely different experience. I struggled initially with the tighter space and the awkwardness of performing tasks almost the opposite way round from what I had been used to throughout all my training. Even the simple things, like reaching for switches or looking for references outside the cockpit, felt unnatural at first. It was a real test of adaptability, but I took it as part of the challenge and reminded myself that learning to teach others required me to be flexible and patient with my own learning too.

Another aspect that I found difficult was explaining what I was doing while flying. As a student, I was used to focusing entirely on my own handling and performance, but now I had to verbalise every thought process and action. It's one thing to know what to do, it's another thing entirely to be able to clearly explain it to someone else in a way that makes sense. In the early stages, I often found myself getting tongue-tied or forgetting to speak while concentrating on the flying itself. However, with practice and guidance, I learned how to structure my explanations more effectively and deliver them in a calm, confident manner.

By around 15 hours into the 30-hour course, everything started to click. My coordination from the right seat improved, and I became more comfortable with both the flying and the teaching aspects as well as identifying student mistakes. It was such a satisfying feeling to see how far I had come, and it gave me a newfound respect for all the instructors who had taught me in the past. The course not only improved my flying ability but also helped me grow in communication, patience, and confidence.

A huge part of my progress was thanks to my instructor, Eva, who was absolutely amazing. She had a calm and encouraging teaching style that made even the most difficult lessons enjoyable. She pushed me when I needed it but always made sure, I understood what I was doing and why. We covered the course lesson by lesson where Eva taught me a lesson and I acted as the student, we then switched roles and I delivered the lesson whilst she acted as a student, making mistakes deliberately, from which I learnt a lot. Eva also conducted ground sessions with me, focusing on how to teach and structure briefings. These sessions were invaluable because they not only refreshed my theoretical knowledge but also helped me learn how to communicate complex topics in a way that students could understand.



All Recordings		Edit
Lesson 10 brief	17 Jul 2025	15:46
I teach lesson 4a again	17 Jul 2025	1:02:21
Lesson 108.1 I teach EVA teach 108.2	16 Jul 2025	1:44:49
Lesson 108.2 brief	16 Jul 2025	12:35
Lesson 108.1	16 Jul 2025	1:20:52
Lesson 108.1 brief	15 Jul 2025	14:02

One of the best pieces of advice I can give to anyone taking the course is to make voice recordings of the briefings and lessons (with permission from your instructor). Being able to go back and listen to them afterwards made a huge difference for me. It helped me identify where I could made mistakes and could improve and reinforced what I had learned during each session. It also gave me more confidence in delivering briefings clearly and professionally.

Looking back, I can honestly say that the Flight Instructor Course was an incredible journey of personal and professional development. It tested me in new ways and showed me that teaching is as much about learning as it is about instructing. Completing the course and earning my qualification felt like a major accomplishment, not just because of the hard work involved, but because it marked the beginning of a new chapter in my flying career. It took me years to get here due to self-funding, and I managed to complete the FI course an entire year before I otherwise could have afforded to. I will be eternally grateful.





Now, I'm proud to say that I've started working as an instructor at The Pilot Centre, where I completed my training. Being able to teach students in the same environment where I learned is both rewarding and nostalgic. Every day brings something new, and I continue to learn from my students as much as they learn from me. The course gave me the skills, confidence, and mindset I needed to take this next step, and I couldn't be more grateful for the experience.

Looking Ahead

My next steps are to teach students while also looking to complete my Multi Engine Instrument Rating (MEIR), UPRT, and APS MCC course, which will bring me even closer to achieving my next goal of becoming a professional airline pilot. My long-term dream is to one day become a training captain, guiding and inspiring future pilots as they embark on their own journeys in aviation.

When I look back at how far I've come, from that 7-year-old girl in the cockpit in India to now teaching others to fly, it feels surreal. But I know none of this would have been possible without my mum. She has been my biggest supporter, my motivation, and the one person who believed in me when nobody else did. We both worked for years, saving and sacrificing to make my training possible. Every single achievement, every flight, every licence, every milestone exists because of her strength, love, and belief in me. I truly wouldn't be where I am today without her.



And finally, I am incredibly grateful to The Stelios Philanthropic Foundation and Honourable Company of Air Pilots for the Flying Instructor Scholarship, which has given me the opportunity to continue excelling and growing as a pilot. It has helped me develop my teaching skills, share my passion for aviation with others, and progress further than I ever imagined.

This journey has been full of challenges and unforgettable moments, and it's still only just beginning. For me, flying isn't just a career; it's my purpose, my freedom, and my biggest reason for happiness. My next chapter starts now...

