The Honourable Company Of Air Pilots- Stelios Philanthropic Award
Manisha Potiwal

When I set my sights on the aviation industry the profession seemed inaccessible and there were many barriers to enter. I was determined to not be kept grounded. My financial position did not allow me to pursue my commercial career until 2019. Once I built sufficient funds to complete the PPL, COVID struck which delayed my training but I remained determined and obtained my PPL in 2021. I decided to study the Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training course at BNU which allowed me to obtain a degree whilst also completing the next phases of my commercial training. The ATPLs were far from smooth. I faced the prospect of having to retake and fund my entire ATPLs as I had one attempt left to pass two exams. Fortunately, by the grace of God and some hard work, I moved on to the hour building and the advanced training. During that time, I took on various roles in BA, Ryanair and Jet2 which gave me exposure to pilots and the network which supports aviation operations. Alongside working in the profession, I undertook the MEIR and I was approaching yet another deadline. I took the difficult decision to resign from my full-time job and commit to completing my training. I completed my MEIR 3 days before my ATPLs were due to expire. I completed the APS/MCC shortly after. It has taken 7 years to reach this position and while I am incredibly proud I could not have done it without the encouragement of my family, friends and instructors.

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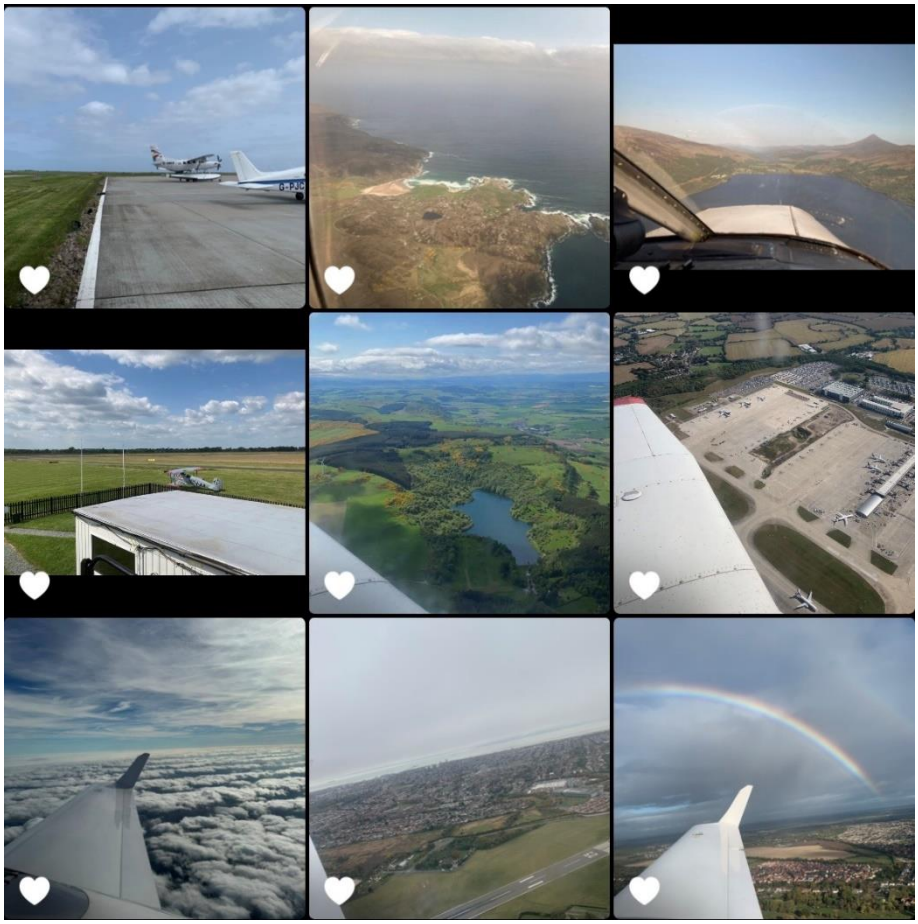

I have always admired my flight instructors and impressed by their ability to adapt their teaching style. I never considered becoming a flight instructor because I did not think I had what it takes to teach. On reflection, given the setbacks I have faced, I appreciate the challenges faced by students and believe I can help them overcome it. Consequently, when making the initial application the answers to the application questions flowed easily and effortlessly. I was delighted to be invited for an interview. I was grateful that the panellist recognised my passion and potential to be a good flight instructor.

My most memorable experience from the instructing course..

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Upon commencing the course, the first difficulty I faced was managing a full-time job whilst completing the training within the specified timeframe. My instructor Eva was extremely accommodating, and the flexibility she provided allowed me to progress through the training smoothly.

The second challenge I faced was transitioning to the right-hand seat. Having spent all my training sitting in the left-hand seat, my flying abilities became natural and instinctive. Despite my perspective changing, it was fulfilling knowing how easily I had become acclimatised to the right-hand seat. Eva was patient and encouraging.

The lack of consistency in my flying made delivering briefings and instructing in the aircraft difficult to follow and lacked fluency. Fortunately, Eva allowed me to record the briefings. From these recordings, I was able to inform the student what I expected and what to expect in the aircraft.

Towards the end of the training, Eva asked whether there was any particular part of the course that I wanted to revisit, and I remember delivering the stalling exercise incoherently. When delivering the briefing and the flight the second time, I was more confident and delighted that the lesson progressed more naturally.

I was fortunate enough to fly the C172 and PA28 and landed on a farm strip with a hangar full of vintage aircraft. The instructing course has built so much confidence and resilience, which I hope to impart to students.

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I will continue to support The Pilot Centre as a Flight Instructor. I am determined to make and show that the profession is accessible to others who come from non-traditional backgrounds. I hope to be living proof that people from these backgrounds can be pilots and encourage them to pursue the profession. I fundamentally believe that means should not be a barrier to enter this profession and a pilot should be judged on merit and skill.

Thank you to The Honourable Company Of Air Pilots for presenting me with the Stelios Philanthropic Award. I would also like to thank Eva Ceh, my mum, brother and Priyanka for their continuous support, for which without I would not be where I am today.