

Air Pilot Benevolent Fund PPL Scholarship 2022

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It seems so surreal to be writing this as a qualified pilot with my PPL training behind me, what a fantastic summer it has been! When I began my flight training as part of the scholarship, I had already completed 30 hours through the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme (leading to my first solo) in 2019 and my own funding since July 2021. I had been slowly progressing through the syllabus and had reached my first solo navigation flight but had been held back by cost. After the application process earlier this year, I was absolutely over the moon to find out that I had been successful and would be able to complete my PPL in a matter of months as a result!



Taxiing past the Red Arrows at Blackpool

I decided to complete my scholarship with the BAE Flying Club based at Blackpool (EGNH), as I had previously been training with them so already knew their aircraft and my instructor. My initial flights involved recapping basic navigation, including flying a route down the busy Manchester low-level corridor (an essential for EGNH-based pilots!). Completing some circuits also helped me improve my landing skills, which would come in handy for the subsequent land away phase.

For me, the land away phase was the most enjoyable part of the course. My first land away with my instructor was to Caernarfon, which meant transiting the Liverpool zone before a

picturesque routing along the North Wales coast and Menai Strait. The navigation element of this flight was very straightforward given it was just following the coast, though I initially found the radio part more challenging.



The Menai Strait

Asking Liverpool for a zone transit was daunting, and the first attempt didn't go very well (mind blank!). Before making the next enroute call to RAF Valley, my instructor and I practised what I would say multiple times, which meant that the initial call went a lot more smoothly. Upon landing in Caernarfon, we sat in the sun and debriefed what could've been improved before making the return leg back to Blackpool.

The next land away was to Sleaf in Shropshire. Sleaf is slightly more challenging to navigate to due to less distinguishable features and lack of coastline. I felt much more confident on this trip, having practiced my radio calls at home and carefully thought about the overhead join. At this stage, I'd really developed an



G-BHFI at Sleaf

appreciation for the importance of thorough planning and preparation – thinking each element through beforehand helps improve your performance in flight. My landing at Sleaf was certainly not my finest, which I noted might have been attributable to the thinner runway, changing perception of height. Again, my instructor and I debriefed in the (brilliant) café at Sleaf before returning to Blackpool.

By the time it came to my first solo land away to Caernarfon, I was confident in my abilities but also slightly apprehensive. The flight went well, despite the slightly bumpy landing! My next solo land away was to Sleaf, which was helped by me being the only one at the airfield (Sleaf can be very busy!).

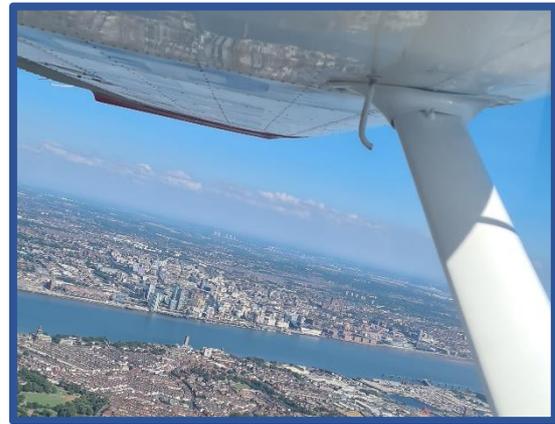
At this stage, I was almost ready for my Qualifying Cross Country (QXC). After planning the route and working out the mass & balance calculations, I flew the route with my instructor, going from Blackpool to Sleaf to Caernarfon to Blackpool. Having visited each airfield twice already, my joins were much improved and the practice QXC went well.

The day of my QXC arrived on the 27th August. I had my route prepared and worked out the headings based on the wind forecast for the day as before. Each leg went well, though I had to fly lower than planned due to cloud-base on the first leg, and had to route around restricted airspace for the Rhyl Air Show on the way home. Overall, the QXC was a very enjoyable day, and it really felt like I had a lot more confidence in flying the aircraft.



G-BHFI at Caernarfon on my QXC

At this point I had passed all 9 of the theory exams and the practical RT exam. Balancing this workload had been an additional challenge, as I was balancing my time between PPL training and my full-time Aerospace Engineering Degree Apprenticeship.



Views of Liverpool enroute to Sleaf

The final stage happened very quickly, completing a revision flight, a mock test and the actual skills test in 3 consecutive days. The revision flight with my instructor covered practically everything that would be in the test, from diversions and VORs to stalls and glide approaches. Some of this content I hadn't practiced since 2021, so there were points for improvement but generally I felt confident for my mock test the next day. The mock test with the chief flying instructor focused mainly on general handling, as I had been happy with the navigation and diversion phase the day before. Landing after a few circuits, I felt ready for my test the next day (though also nervous!).

Test day. I expected to be feeling incredibly nervous, but instead felt almost strangely calm! I attribute this to the amount of preparation I had done beforehand, considering everything from weather reports to VOR frequencies. My examiner talked me through the structure of the test, giving me a chance to ask any final questions. Once the test started, I just had to stay focused and remember what I had been taught. After landing, it felt like hours before he shook my hand and said 'Congratulations'. The feeling of sheer happiness and relief was similar

to the moment of finding out about my scholarship application success – I could hardly believe that I had just become a Private Pilot!

My future ambitions involve gaining my night rating and hour building in the short term, before gaining an ATPL and working towards my ultimate goal of becoming a civilian test pilot in the long term. In the meantime, I plan to continue working as a Human Factors Engineer on Tempest to both build my knowledge and fund my flying, before being licensed for a flying job.

I owe a huge amount of gratitude to the many people who helped me reach what is now my proudest achievement. I'd like to thank the BAE Flying Club for the behind-the-scenes training support, and in particular my instructor Andy Leak – I couldn't have had a better instructor! Thanks also to my family and friends for their support and putting up with my 'weather-dependant availability', I can't wait to take you all flying soon. Finally, a huge thank you to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. This scholarship has not only been an immense help in achieving the first step towards my flying career, but has also resulted in an incredibly enjoyable summer to remember - **Thank you!**



Ready for departure at E2, before QXC



After passing my Skills Test!

