

Air Pilots Benevolent Fund PPL Scholarship 2025

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This summer I had the most incredible privilege of attaining my Private Pilot's Licence, made possible through the generosity of The Honourable Company of Air Pilots. My journey into aviation began relatively late— at age 16— when I joined the Air Cadets. Soon after, on the 18th of December 2023, I completed my very first trial flight at Denham Aerodrome, an absolutely incredible experience which most definitely confirmed my decision to try my very best to become a pilot. From then on, I sought every opportunity to obtain experience in the industry, from British Airways work experience days at Heathrow to completing a gliding scholarship with HCAP in the summer of 2024.

Before I knew it, the PPL scholarship applications were opening for 2025. I decided to apply without any expectation whatsoever. The process began with a written application, followed by a short, recorded interview introducing yourself and your ambitions. To my amazement, I was shortlisted as one of the final 30 candidates to be invited to interview at Air Pilots House in London on the 3rd April. I was truly ecstatic and determined to make the most of the opportunity!

When the interview day came, to say I was nervous would be an understatement. The assessment day comprised of two sections: a short, group maths test (not independent!), and an interview with a panel. However, as soon as you arrive you realise you have absolutely nothing to worry about; the interviewers do everything they can to make it as comfortable as possible, nothing more than a relaxed discussion about yourself and your ambitions. I left the interview feeling positive but still absolutely convinced I had not done enough to achieve a scholarship. That made it all the more unbelievable when, just over a day later, I received a phone call informing me that I had been awarded a scholarship. I will never truly be able to adequately put into words how I felt in that moment, a combination of shock, disbelief, and excitement about what the future holds.

The PPL composes of 45 hours of flight training (alongside countless hours of pre and post-flight briefings), nine theoretical exams covering topics from human performance and meteorology to principles of flight and navigation, and a Radio Exam (FRTOL) which gives you the ability to operate the radio equipment under your own licence.

After completing my A-levels in the summer, I was very excited to get started on my PPL. I had my first lesson at the end of June, but I was away until the 21st of July, so it wasn't until 23rd July that my PPL training truly started. I conducted my training at West London Aero Club

(White Waltham) in Maidenhead, right on the verge of Heathrow Airspace, training on a PA28. This proved to be a very good, but challenging place to learn. Navigating how to remain clear of Heathrow airspace, whilst also having six different circuits to learn (three runways), and all grass, was quite daunting initially— especially for a total beginner. However, with time, it meant everything which I had originally deemed 'challenging' all started to slot into place, a huge milestone for me.



The initial lessons start right from the basics of general handling: learning the effects of controls, straight and level flight, and climbing and descending. Before I knew it, I was being sent solo on the 2nd of August. I must say, this comes round much quicker than you'd expect! I can still remember the nerves I felt prior to this, my legs shaking on the rudder pedals. However, as soon as you're airborne you realise you had

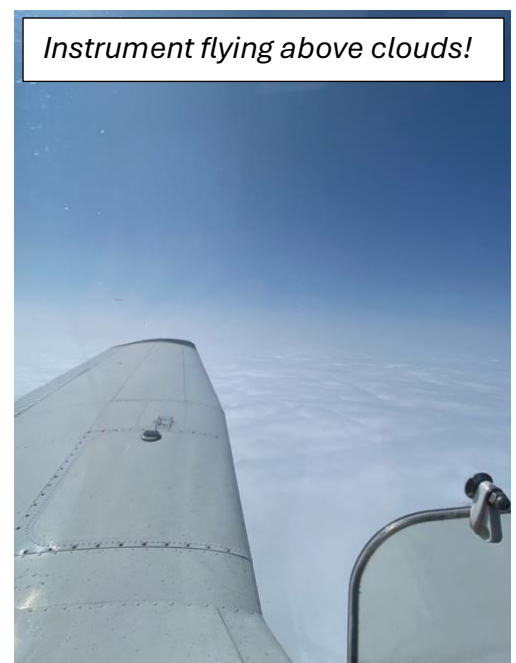
nothing to worry about, at this point you will be prepared- your instructors wouldn't have sent you solo if they didn't believe you could do it! It is most definitely the point where you can truly see your hard work beginning to pay off, officially being able to safely fly a plane on your own, a day I am certain I will never forget!



From then onwards, everything begins to happen more rapidly. Dual navigation lessons started, initially doing simpler triangular routes, then to landing at different airfields (for me, this was Goodwood, Turweston and Thruxton) and learning how to track and locate your position using VORs. However, it was around this time that I got a call from TUI, informing me that I had successfully secured a place on their MPL pilot cadet scheme. This, again, was an absolute shock and a moment I never believed would happen... although, I was due to start my training on September 9th, so the pressure was ON to get my PPL complete!

Alongside flying, I was revising for my PPL exams. Initially concerned about completing these, I pushed them back and back, until I realised I could not push them back anymore. I ended up completing 6 of the exams in just over two weeks, and to my surprise, I had pushed them back for no reason at all. They are straightforward, multiple-choice questions where familiarity with the content and hard work will guarantee you a good score, most definitely not something to profusely stress about!

The last topic on the syllabus is instrument flying. This was my favourite and definitely my best PPL topic by a mile. My instructors, Pete, Mick, and Dean made the experience very memorable for me; the only time I ever wore a 'hood' to complete IMC was during my skills test... every other time I was lucky enough to get the proper experience flying through cloud! These were undoubtedly my favourite moments of my PPL journey, and I will fondly remember my first flight above clouds in a light aircraft for years to come.





Having completed all my exams and revision lessons prior to my skills test, it was time to do my QXC on 6th September. My routing was White Waltham — Turweston — Goodwood — White Waltham. This had initially been the thing I was most anxious about over the course of my PPL, the independence of flying half the way across the country, just me and the plane. However, at this stage of the course, you are most definitely capable. It proved to be a very incredible experience, and one I can say I truly enjoyed (to my disbelief).

From then on, I only had one thing left to do... my skills test. The weather, after being incredible all summer, decided to take a turn for the worst. Booking my skills test alongside coordinating my schedule with TUI proved challenging but at last, a day of good weather came... the 19th September. After completing all my pre-flight performance calculations and

weather checks, I arrived at the airfield a few hours ahead of my skills test to meet my examiner, David. I was always told to not stress too much about my skills test, but I would be lying to say my heart wasn't in my throat! However, it was truly a very positive experience, I would describe it more as a skills check, ensuring you're flying safely, not that you're perfect at every manoeuvre! The skills test included a pre-flight debrief of any applicable NOTAMs, weather conditions, and performance calculations. Then, I completed a navigation from White Waltham to Devizes to Wing, where on the 2nd leg you get diverted, in my case to Greenham Common. From here, you complete manoeuvres like stalling and steep turns, before heading back to complete the last part of the circuit work. Upon landing and completing a rejected take-off, I was told to taxi off the runway, stop, and put the brakes on.

Next thing I knew, my examiner was shaking my hand, informing me I had successfully passed my skills test, meaning I am officially a PPL holder— a moment I thought would never come after a long summer of hard work and dedication! Reflecting back now, it still feels surreal.



View of the South Coast on my QXC



Turweston Airfield on my QXC

Top Tips:

- **Work hard:** The scholarship is TOUGH. The evening of my 18th Birthday was spent revising for the three exams I had the following day. I was always told you will reach a wall where you may not think you'll manage to get it done. This happened for me around the navigation time. You may start to lose motivation and think it's impossible... it's not! Just keep working and everything will work itself out.
- **Be organised:** Even from the start, pre-interview when creating a plan for HCAP... make it as detailed as possible. Make it known that you've thought about everything which may go wrong and delay your progress, pick your flight school wisely, and stay on top of your plan. Make time for weather delays and aircraft maintenance schedules in your initial plan.
- **Sit your exams:** They are not as bad as they look! Stay on top of them and aim to get as many done towards the start of your PPL as possible.
- **Flying experience:** You don't need hours and hours of flight time, even a trial flight will be ideal to make sure you enjoy the feeling before completing a licence!
- **Hours:** 45 hours is the lowest hours you can pass a PPL on, it is not impossible, but it is tough. Stay organised, track your progress, and don't be afraid of having an extra couple of hours if you feel you need it for reassurance!

I'd like to thank West London Aero Club— in particular to Pete, Mick, and Dean (my instructors), and Angie in Operations— for their incredible support throughout my training, going above and beyond to accommodate me and, remarkably, never once cancelling a lesson during the entire course of my PPL. I would never have got here without you, so thank you so much! I'd also like to thank my mentor, Jack Lippiatt, for always being on-hand to ask questions and check in with me about my progress, it is really appreciated and I'm so glad to have had the support from someone who had gone through it themselves.

However, none of this would've been possible without the generosity of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and the Air Pilots Benevolent Fund. This experience has been truly life-changing— not only allowing me to achieve my dream of becoming a qualified pilot but also inspiring me with the confidence, discipline, and determination which will ultimately serve me for the rest of my career. Looking back on my scholarship now, one month into TUI MPL training, I can credit HCAP hugely for introducing me to the industry through my initial gliding scholarship, ultimately leading to my PPL this year. It is this which inspired me to apply to the scheme and hopefully is just the start to a long career in the industry so, once again, thank you so much! My PPL is something I will reflect positively on for years to come, and I can't wait to remain in contact with The Company as I progress further into my career.

Hence, if you are considering applying for the scholarship... go for it! You have absolutely nothing to lose and it could be absolutely life changing. I never believed I would get the scholarship, but anything is possible! If you don't succeed first time, try again... it is worth it!