

AIR BP STERLING SCHOLARSHIP REPORT

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It has been a boyhood dream of mine to become a pilot after being captivated at a young age by the inexplicable feelings of freedom and escapism that are associated with flight along with the fascination of the engineering marvels of modern aircraft. I remember receiving a flight simulator program for a birthday, and subsequently spending hours flying around, wishing it was the real thing! At the age of 13, I had my first taste into flying through gliding, initially starting as an affordable and early route into aviation, however I very quickly fell in love with the beauty of the sport and have continued to keep gliding as a hobby.

Having heard first-hand the incredible opportunity that this scholarship offers, I was eager to apply. The application form is a concise but thorough introduction of yourself and motivation. I was fortunate enough to then be selected for interview, which in itself is an invaluable experience and practice for anyone looking to be involved in the aviation world, and less than a month later I was delighted to hear that I had been awarded the Air BP PPL Sterling scholarship.

I started training in late June after A-Level exams had finished. The honourable company of air pilots had been fantastic in helping support my choice of flying school, allowing me to attend my first choice Stapleford Flight Centre. I was quickly acquainted to my instructor, Jun and later a second instructor John, who were both ready and eager to push me forward and achieve the goal of gaining my PPL by October.

We covered a lot of exercises in the first 5 hours in thanks to transferrable skills from gliding. I thoroughly recommend gliding to anyone wanting to step on the first rungs of the ladder of aviation as it is a highly cost effective and enjoyable way of getting into flying. It provides you with a comprehensive basic understanding of principles of flight, meteorology and experience in the air which will help you no end when transitioning to powered flying. After completing five and a half hours of training and the Air Law ground exam, I was ecstatic to be sent solo for the first time. The first solo flight is a once in a lifetime feeling, when you are trusted for the first time for the safe conduct of the flight all on your own, a surreal experience!



After my first solo flight the training syllabus progressed on, moving onto more advanced skills such as navigation and more complex air work. Aside from my first solo flight and achieving the PPL, the most enjoyable part for me was the navigation. There is something about being able to fly across counties in less than an hour, whilst also enjoying some spectacular views that is so enjoyable for me! Having flown a couple of sorties around my home county of Essex and neighbouring Kent, I embarked on my first solo cross country flight. It was slightly daunting switching over the radio for the first time on your own, knowing that you have to trust your training and ability. However, once again there is an immense sense of satisfaction and achievement having successfully completed a solo cross country which encourages and fuels you to do more.



I enjoyed every moment of training, however there were certainly some stand out flights during training. One day my instructor and I were trying to decide where it was best to explore next. Coincidentally Reading festival was on that weekend, so therefore we made the short half an hour flight across to say hello to friends enjoying the festival! Not only was this a fun experience, but also very beneficial it routed me over new areas with fairly complicated and delicate airspace which helped improve my navigational skills.

Another memorable flight during training was a land away to Duxford, an old WWII airfield and now museum with a large array of exhibits. Having set out from Stapleford, we routed around the Stansted airspace and before we knew it, we were requesting the airfield information. What is perhaps unique about Duxford is that it is a hub for classic aircraft experience flights. It was slightly surreal to be sharing the circuit with Dragon Rapides and Tiger Moths! The highlight of the trip however was seeing a spitfire taxiing merely meters away after shutting down and securing the C152, something you only get to experience through the wonders of general aviation!



Aside from the flying, the scholarship also presented a unique opportunity to attend a congratulatory event at Air BP's headquarters, in order to celebrate their fifth year in supporting young people achieve their dreams and aspirations. It was a very enjoyable and insightful day, and it was really pleasant talking to previous scholars about their experiences and subsequent progressions into a career in aviation. We were also fortunate enough to meet and talk to the CEO and other high-ranking members of Air BP, where we got a really insightful look into the world of refuelling and the global operations of Air BP. It certainly surprised me how much goes on behind the scenes to make commercial aviation both possible and safe.



Myself (far left) with the previous 4 recipients of the Air BP Sterling Scholarship and Air BP CEO Jon Platt



Later on in training, I embarked on my Qualifying Cross country, a flight more than 150nm long, landing away at two other aerodromes. My route took me down over Kent to the seaside airport of Lydd, before routing north overhead Southend airport to Earls Colne, and then retuning back to Stapleford. It was certainly a tiring few flights, I distinctly remember immense reward of arriving back at Stapleford after over 2 and a half hours of flying with the satisfaction that I had completed another step in the journey of achieving my PPL. The final milestone was the general skills test. Since the start of the training, the PPL skills test had always been on the back of my mind. However, my apprehensions were relieved both throughout training through mock tests and practicing content, but also after receiving the briefing with the examiner. After the minimum 45 hours required, I was recommended for the test and crossed my fingers for good weather on test day! Fortunately, the conditions were lovely, and I had a very enjoyable flight with my examiner, who was great at making me feel at ease. After landing and hearing the news I had passed my PPL I was absolutely ecstatic, but also slightly sad that it had all come to an end!

The scholarship has been hands down, one of the best experiences of my life and I cannot recommend the scholarship highly enough. Not only does the generous scholarship cover all flying, exam and revision material costs, the honourable company of air pilots are also fantastic in supporting students along the way. The training can be intense, and the commitment needed should not be underestimated from the theory revision, to the amount of days needed to be dedicated to achieving your PPL (the great British weather will often disrupt your flying plans!). However, the rewards are simply unparalleled. The sense of achievement and reward is so strong and will definitely leave you craving for more! Achieving my PPL and taking the first step into a wider career in aviation has been a great ambition of mine, however due to the financial barrier of training, would never have been possible without the generosity of the honourable company of air pilots. It has been an immense privilege to have been Air BP's fifth sterling scholar, and I am forever grateful for both Air BP and Honourable company of air pilots' generosity and work for providing unparalleled opportunities for young people getting into flying.

