



Air Pilots Trust Scholarship

Ruby Wood

2026

My interest in aviation really began during the 2020 lockdown, ironically when no commercial flights were operating. I vividly remember sitting in my garden watching UPS Boeing 747 cargo flights operating out of London Stansted and wondering, 'how on earth does that get airborne?' That curiosity quickly developed into a wider interest in aviation, initially through air accident investigation and safety. At that stage, becoming a pilot was not even on my radar, I simply knew that I wanted to build a career in aviation. I didn't really know where to start, as no one in my family was currently in aviation, and the last pilot in my family flew for the RAF during the Battle of Britain in 1940.

In 2023, I started university studying Air Transport Management, wanting to gain a broad understanding of the industry before deciding which direction to take. During my first year, I realised that I wanted to become a pilot, although the cost of training made the goal feel financially out of reach. After flying as a passenger in a PA28 Warrior with a friend, I knew I wanted to experience flying as a pilot. I began applying for scholarships, but after several unsuccessful applications, I decided to take matters into my own hands.



My first time in a light aircraft - A Piper Warrior, (G-BSCY)

I booked my first flying lesson at Andrewsfield Aviation on 22 August 2025. From the moment the Cessna 152 left the ground, I knew I had found something I genuinely loved. Being at the controls under instruction felt like total freedom, and that first lesson gave me the confidence to start pursuing the PPL seriously.

After a few more lessons, and lots of weather cancellations, I applied for the HCAP PPL Scholarship. Having experienced several rejections already, I was not expecting to

progress, so receiving the invitation to the next stage was a huge moment for me, I actually cried with happiness! Reaching the interview stage while I was at university was equally exciting, and although I was nervous on the day, the staff and volunteers at Air Pilots House made the process feel welcoming and supportive. When one of my interviewers, Phoebe, called to tell me I had been awarded the scholarship about a week later, I was overwhelmed with excitement. It made the goal of becoming a pilot feel genuinely achievable.

I knew from the outset that I had to make the most of the limited time available. With a three-week family holiday already booked for August and ongoing work commitments, I finished my university dissertation and began flying at Andrewsfield as soon as possible. I commenced the scholarship on 5 June and went straight into circuit training in the Cessna 152. The first few weeks were a whirlwind of learning checks, techniques and manoeuvres, usually involving two or three lessons in a day. Although there was a lot to remember, I was fortunate to be surrounded by people who were generous with their advice and encouragement. I also backseated several flights, which helped me understand how individual techniques fitted together and gave me a better appreciation of the bigger picture.

I quickly became very attached to the airfield and its community. In between lessons, I spent time helping wherever I could, from cleaning aircraft and assisting in the office to helping with refuelling. Andrewsfield became a home away from home, and that supportive environment made a significant difference to my confidence and motivation during an intense period of training.



Andrewsfield from above in a club member's Cessna 182!



An afternoon off well spent cleaning up N75822, A C172 called 'Blondie'

I then took a week away from flying to sit my nine ground school examinations, all of which went well. Returning to the airfield afterwards, I felt refreshed and ready to continue. Only a few days later, on 1 July, my instructor, Mick Pitcher, told me that I was going to fly a circuit solo. The feeling was a mixture of pure excitement and fear but completing that first solo was one of the most significant moments of the scholarship for me.



Photos taken after my first solo, and my certificate!

After solo consolidation, I moved into navigation training, which I initially found much more difficult than the circuit. It felt as though I had gone back to square one, particularly when trying to manage the different elements of planning, flying and monitoring the aircraft at the same time. The most useful part of this stage was learning not to interpret difficulty as failure. The people around me repeatedly reminded me that struggling with a new phase was normal and that confidence would come with practice. That support helped me become more patient with my own learning and more willing to identify weaknesses rather than become frustrated by them.

As the navigation lessons progressed, the routes became longer and I completed my first dual land-away at Peterborough Connington. I was initially daunted by the change from the grass runway I was used to at Andrewsfield to Connington's tarmac runway. With some verbal guidance from Mick, I completed a decent landing, and that flight became another important confidence point. It was one of the first occasions during training where I came away thinking, 'maybe I really can do this.'



Land away at Peterborough Connington
– first time landing on tarmac!



Returning to Andrewsfield after completing my QXC

Major milestones began to come thick and fast after that. My first and second solo navigation flights took place on the same day, and with the weather remaining favourable for such a sustained period, I very quickly progressed towards my Qualifying Cross Country (QXC). My QXC took me from Andrewsfield to Norwich, before continuing to Peterborough Connington via an overhead at King's Lynn, and then returning to Andrewsfield. I departed shortly after 06:30 in an effort to avoid the peak temperatures later in the day, which reached 34°C. The early start worked extremely well, and the flight from Andrewsfield to Norwich was some of the smoothest flying I had experienced throughout my training.

Landing back at Andrewsfield after completing the QXC, I felt like a true aviatrix in a way I had not quite experienced before. Considering how challenging I had initially found navigation, I was surprised by how quickly I had progressed. The QXC gave me a real sense of how much my confidence and ability had developed over the course of the scholarship, and it was a moment where I could genuinely recognise how far I had come.

My skills test was then booked for 6 August, just one week before I was due to leave for a three-week holiday. This meant that the final stage of my training came with a significant increase in preparation and focus, as there was now a clear deadline to work towards. A great deal of preparation went into ensuring that I was ready, and it felt like a real shift from the earlier stages of my training.

During the skills test, I demonstrated my navigation skills by flying to Shepherds Grove and then onwards to Woodbridge, including a diversion to Birch disused. I also completed upper-air exercises, including stalls and practice forced landings, before returning to Andrewsfield to demonstrate my circuit and landing skills.

After a very long day, I passed my skills test just before 18:00 on 6 August. Having worked towards this moment for the duration of the scholarship, the relief and excitement were

difficult to put into words. What made the achievement even more special was seeing how many people had come down to the airfield to support me. I could not quite believe that the day I had been working towards had finally arrived.



G-ECAD, the aircraft I completed my skills test in, and my new wings!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for awarding me the Air Pilots Trust Scholarship. The scholarship has not only provided me with an invaluable stepping stone towards a career as a commercial pilot, but has also made a dream of mine a reality. Throughout the scholarship, I have gained a newfound confidence in my abilities and a renewed motivation to continue pursuing aviation wholeheartedly. I would strongly encourage any aspiring pilot to apply for the HCAP Scholarship. It is an incredible opportunity that can have a genuinely life-changing impact, both professionally and personally.

I would also like to thank everyone at Andrewsfield Aviation for their constant support, encouragement and guidance throughout my training and beyond. Learning to fly has been the highlight of my life so far, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have discovered Andrewsfield when I did. The people I have met along the way have made the experience all the more special, and I have made friendships that I hope will last a lifetime. Andrewsfield has become much more than simply the place where I learnt to fly. It is somewhere that I will always consider a home.