

Stelios Philanthropic Foundation PPL Scholarship 2026

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Over the summer, straight after my A-levels, I've been so blessed to be able to undertake intensive training that has led to achieving my Private Pilot Licence! Thank you so much to the Stelios Philanthropic Foundation for making this possible.

The past few months have been incredibly challenging, rewarding and life-changing for me. Just over two years ago, I finished my GCSEs and took part in two consecutive gliding scholarships at the London Gliding Club with the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and the Air League. I then continued training, went solo and carried on enjoying gliding as a senior cadet.



I started off my course with some general handling refresher training, bringing back my experience from the Air League 5-hour flying scholarship the year before. After the first lesson I was back up to speed and went straight into circuit flying!

Flying at Elstree can be quite unique given its proximity to busy controlled airspace (London CTR to the south, Luton CTR to the north and the LTMA

above) and some dense traffic in the surrounding Class G airspace. The large residential areas and noise abatement considerations certainly add to the experience.

During this stage of the course, I got more comfortable handling the aeroplane in a variety of conditions, and flew my first solo in a powered aircraft!





My next stage was solo consolidation, during which I needed to build 5 hours of solo circuit flying. This proved to be quite the test of resilience as weather often exceeded the limitations of a student pilot flying solo, particularly with gusts and crosswinds. This time was usually spent beginning my navigation training, which was fantastic!

The navigation stage was definitely the highlight of my training. I started off getting used to VFR navigation techniques such as dead reckoning and orienting myself with a half-mil map. Thanks to prior training and getting my FRTOL (Flight Radiotelephony Operator's Licence) the year before, it wasn't long until I was comfortable using the radio while transiting busy controlled airspace! I really enjoyed the satisfaction of a great flight after loads of preparation and applying the theoretical knowledge.



Very soon I was able to fly my first solo navigation flight! It was quite a blast leaving the circuit alone for the first time, communicating with local radar service units and re-entering Elstree independently.



Not long after, I did my first solo landaway at Duxford! I'd say this was my most memorable flight, as I parked and looked back at the aircraft in shock, realising I had just flown myself to a different airfield! I still get a smile on my face thinking about it!



The Imperial War Museum at Duxford definitely added to the experience, walking around and seeing the beautiful Harrier just 10 minutes after landing. It was quite surreal to have flown myself there and then be standing next to such an iconic aircraft moments later.



By this point I started to realise how quickly everything had gone by and the fact that my Qualifying Cross Country (QXC) was about to happen. After loads of planning and some last minute mental prep, I got set up and departed for a long flight from Elstree to Wellesbourne, then Duxford, before returning to Elstree. This was a wonderful day to fly, but it was also one of the hottest days of 2026 with temperatures reaching 38°C! This also meant there were loads of thermals around (meaning rising and sinking air, and lots of turbulence), making it a fantastic day for gliding but a fun challenge for me trying to fly a Cessna 152 in a straight line! This was genuinely so enjoyable, and rather insane at Duxford with a MiG-17F parked behind me!



MiG-17F (Lim-5) parked behind my aircraft at Duxford during my QXC!

Now I had one last obstacle – the PPL skills test. The weather proved a massive hurdle during this time, meaning I had to cancel and reschedule my skills test flights twice before the third attempt which went ahead!

Finally, the METARs, TAFs and exam availability lined up and, after heaps of planning, study and anticipation, I passed and can now call myself a licensed private pilot!

If someone had told me two years ago that I would now be flying both light aircraft and sailplanes, I simply wouldn't have believed it. My ambition and love for aviation isn't going anywhere – I intend to continue learning and improving my flying whilst starting my first year of studies in aeronautical engineering at Imperial College London. What a journey it has been – I'm looking forward to seeing how this all plays out!