

## Maleha Khan Donaldson PPL Scholarship



Over the last eight years, I have immersed myself in many aspects of aviation from military flying to academia in aerodynamics, and it has all been towards the chance of having a career as a pilot. It is thanks to this PPL scholarship that I have finished my training and am officially a private pilot. This is hands down the foundation of my flying career and has unlocked the rest of my aviation dream.

I was fifteen when I decided I wanted to fly for a career and I stubbornly made it my lifelong goal after watching the Red Arrows perform on D-Day. Shortly after, I joined the Air Cadets and had my first ever light aircraft flight in a Grob Tutor

at MoD Boscombe Down. I even changed my university plans to study Aerospace Engineering instead of Medicine and joined a Royal Air Force University Air Squadron (UAS). I was awarded the Air Cadet Pilot Scholarship when I was seventeen years old and I had my first flying lesson amongst the challenging weather in Dundee, Scotland, in an Aquilla.

I was then awarded the Royal Air Forces Association Scholarship following selection to allow me to continue my PPL. I was presented the scholarship by former Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal, Sir Steven Hillier, current Director of the Civil Aviation Authority. I conducted this Scholarship in South Warwickshire in the Cessna 152.

At university, I was selected to join Southampton University Air Squadron in which I spent 4 years and built the strongest relationships and gained invaluable training. I was delighted to return to MoD Boscombe Down where we were based. I saw young air cadets in the very position I was once in. I spent two years as an Officer Cadet before being promoted to the top of the chain of command as a Acting Pilot Officer with the position of Senior Student. I worked extremely closely with my team to run and lead a squadron of over 75 personnel. After one year in this position, I was uniquely given the opportunity to remain in this role for another year. Being the Senior Student for the longest period in UAS history, has not only been my greatest challenge yet, but it has thoroughly prepared me for an aviation career in every aspect of dedication, leadership, team work and confidence.

During this time, I was awarded the British Women's Pilot Association Scholarship of £1,000 to assist in returning to flying. Due to my degree being highly demanding alongside my Air Squadron responsibilities, I struggled heavily to make time for flying and especially being able to regularly afford it. Therefore, my training had come to a stop.



After being selected for the much renowned Honourable Company of Air Pilots Scholarship, I felt

like I was given a chance to finally see my dream through and the news brought tears to my eyes. I was even able to fly from my choice of school at Phoenix Aviation, Lee on Solent where I was already familiar with the PA28 aircraft.



In July 2022, I graduated with an MEng Aeronautics and Astronautics degree from Southampton University with my Masters, specialising in Spacecraft Engineering. I was over the moon to be able to give all my attention to flying with a summer of fantastic weather.

The flying training was enormously intense within the timescale to finish in September that summer, some days I carried out 4 flights a day, but with the extremely generous support of my school and instructor, I was able to complete everything and pass my Skills Test to "commercial standard". What I found most challenging, was further study after my Masters year! Within 37 days, I completed 9 theoretical exams using the AFE textbooks and online resources, averaging over 95%. And so at many times, training became very exhausting alongside other commitments. However, as soon as you get airborne, the thrill of flying just kicks in and I can 100% say that this summer has been the best summer of my life. I was able to do what I love doing most, everyday.

Some of my greatest memories include being in the air with a Spitfire flying around me over the Isle of Wight, even when we were both positioning for final at the same time on my Skills Test! I'll never forget the views of the coast beaming with turquoise colours or landing at Bournemouth International Airport with Ryan Air following behind. The list of memories is endless and I am now on the other side of an 8 year long endeavour thanks to the Honouable Company of Air Pilots.



Moving forward, I will plan to complete my commercial training. I aspire to work in a challenging operational environment such as Search and Rescue. I would also like to build on my PPL with an aerobatic rating - something I thoroughly enjoy and will certainly work towards.