

Richard Breakspear PPL Scholarship

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Having been awarded a gliding scholarship from the Company the previous summer I applied for the 2022 PPL Scholarships and was very fortunate to be awarded the Richard Breakspear scholarship. Once the good news arrived via email the first challenge was to obtain a medical. A PPL can be achieved with a class 2 medical, however with my aspirations in mind and listening to the advice of colleagues at work, it was wise to apply for a class 1 from the get-go. Due to a minor abnormality from the ECG test, further testing was required. This delayed me somewhat but thankfully and with help from the Company I was booked in for my first lesson on July 14th with Blackbushe Aviation.



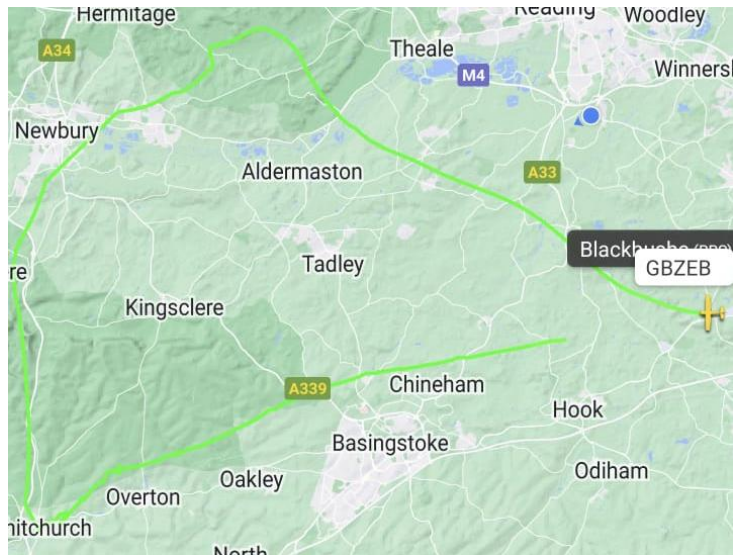
I started the scholarship with minimal previous flying experience, just over 4 hours in a glider and two experience flights many years ago. To be honest I can't remember much from my first lesson as so much has happened since, although I suspect I spent most of it looking out the window at the views! The first few lessons are very basic and introduce you to the basic functions of the controls and how to turn, climb and descend. The little gliding experience I had defiantly helped (and the late nights playing flight sim no doubt), I felt very relaxed and was progressing quickly towards circuit work and then to the first milestone- first solo!

Your first solo is a big thing, it's your instructor's way of telling you he trusts you ...just about. My mentor for the scholarship, Dom, happened to be visiting the day I 'went solo' which was great to share the experience with him. After a few circuits my instructor asked me to make the next circuit to land, I remember thinking to myself I've either messed this up or this is it, he's going to send me solo. Once we'd vacated, he jumped out and off I went, first solo in the bag!

After some solo consolidation it was time to begin the navigation phase. Everyone's experience of learning to navigate is obviously different, what I learnt quickly was planning my route and working out my checkpoints on the ground is one thing and then flying it are two very different things. Being prepared is key but always expect the unexpected! My first experience of solo navigation was a simple route (Blackbushe-Newbury-Whitchurch-Blackbushe). On my map it looked like a perfect triangle, on flight radar as you can see it barely resembles one! First lesson learnt- check and double check your headings on the ground! Once you've proved you can navigate solo you begin to work towards your qualifying cross-country flight, another huge milestone of the course. To start with you fly landaway trips dual and then solo to the chosen places individually before flying to them both in one trip. I chose Turweston and Lee-On-The-Solent. The Blackbushe ATZ is situated within the Farnborough CTR which means the quickest way south is to get a crossing clearance from them to transit their zone. It can appear daunting at first but you soon realise the crossing is very standardised and providing you brief yourself of the possible routings they may ask you to take it's really a case of the more you do it the easier it becomes. This brief overview of the navigation phase doesn't do justice of the effort that was required. I found the flying and preparation the easier bit, it was organising myself to be at the stage I needed to be I found most challenging. I worked full time during the scholarship utilising annual leave where possible and for a period I still found myself behind in some respects. To progress with the course you are required to have completed certain exams by a certain point otherwise you delay the flying. Some of these rules are legal and some the club stipulate. I was at risk of falling behind with the exams which wasn't a good place to be given the scholarship deadline. My mentor Dom was great at supporting me, I was stressed and certainly needed the support and guidance.

Thankfully I was never waiting to complete exams, I just about did it. No doubt if I had completed them earlier, I may have been in a better position to finish on time. After a reminder from the scholarship team of the deadline, my revised plan would have seen me finish within the time period. As we moved into late September and October the weather proved to be the delaying factor. From memory my QXC was postponed at least three times due to weather (this isn't uncommon). The QXC is a real achievement once completed and was the moment I thought this is what flying's all about! I no longer had any annual leave to

use and couldn't afford to let a good weather day slip. I'm fortunate to have a supportive manager at work whom allowed me to split my working day up. After a few hours of working in the morning I set off on my QXC. Blackbushe-Lee on Solent-Turweston-Blackbushe. I was so pleased to have completed my QXC, it's a big day and very rewarding. After a celebratory Nandos it was back to work that evening for a few hours.



Once the QXC is out the way and all the exams are complete, it's a case of prepping for the skills test. The skills test is a demonstration of everything you have been taught, and your opportunity to prove to an examiner you are capable of getting yourself from A to B safely, which includes a demonstration of emergency procedures and recovery from undesirable events that could occur. I had two revision flights focused on the general handling aspects of the test. There are many acronyms to learn during your training and putting them into practise during the revision flights saw me ready to take my skills test on October 18th. Once again, the weather saw my skills test be delayed numerous times before the right day presented itself. Similar to the QXC, I worked during the morning before my skills test and in the evening after, this was a hugely stressful time but ultimately even more rewarding once I had the pass in the bag after just over 46 hours of training!

Looking back on the summer it was a fantastic experience and I'm extremely grateful for the opportunity to complete my PPL by means of a fully funded scholarship. The training is a really fun journey full of highs and sometimes lows (usually getting lost- not fun!) but that's what the training is all about. I learnt a lot from the scholarship, some lessons which I feel could be of a benefit to anyone reading this who perhaps has been awarded one of next years scholarships or for anyone who wants to do a PPL over a shorter period of time than most or might be working whilst doing the scholarship.

- Get a medical most applicable to your goal- don't waste time and money on a class 2 if you're going to need a class 1. I would even suggest getting a class 1 before your interview if your intention is to fly regardless of a successful scholarship application or not, you don't know what might crop up at the medical and delay you starting. From my experience time was everything, give yourself the best opportunity to succeed.
- Start learning the theory before you even start the scholarship. I was reluctant to buy anything as it was included in my scholarship, but it's worth it. After all you are being given a PPL for free! Online material for the exams is often cheaper than the books and from my experience easier to read. Get ahead early, you will thank yourself later on in the course.
- Up to the navigation phase having multiple instructors is fine in my opinion, it's once you begin navigating, sticking to ideally one or two is beneficial. I had five instructors during the build up to my QXC, partly due to my circumstances, which clearly is OK as I now have my PPL. On reflection I spent more time than I needed to trying to remember which instructor does it one way and which does it the other. Generally speaking, each instructor is teaching you the same thing, it's the little differences which can add unwanted complexity when you're learning.
- Chair fly everything. It might sound not cool to sit in your room and pretend to fly a C152 but it's really beneficial. I was told by an instructor they can often tell who spends time going over the different drills at home and who doesn't. When you've pretended to fly 30 touch and goes in your room and can reel off the downwind checks and circuit calls without thinking about it, you free up much more capacity to think about things like where do I need to position myself to account for the cross wind or to actually know where any circuit traffic is when you hear them make their calls rather than it just being a voice talking on the radio. Mental capacity is everything, even in a little 152!
- Be resilient. There were times I defiantly wasn't and that's OK, you learn from it. You're going to make mistakes, flights are going to not go as planned, things are going to happen which you have no control over, just carry on. I was fortunate with the support available to me. From the school, my mentor and from colleagues at work who have been there and done it themselves, many times I sought support and guidance and it really helped.

- Lastly enjoy it! It can get a bit tense at times if you're behind and the deadlines approaching but ultimately everyone wants you to succeed and will give you the best opportunity to do so.

I would like to thank Blackbushe Aviation for hosting me at their school for the scholarship and the instructors who equipped me with the skills to compete the course. Thanks also to those who supported me from the Air Pilots, particularly Dom who spent many evenings listening to me and supporting where he could. To those at work who supported me and at times let me do what I needed to do, thank you also. Lastly a massive thank you to Devon and Somerset Flight Training who were my sponsor for the scholarship.