

Sky Demon Scholarship 2025

Shinji Dennison

My aviation journey started from a very young age, where my family would take me to aircraft museums, which sparked my love for aviation. I took my first trial flight in July 2023, when I was 15 years old, and I was certain from this point onwards that I wanted to be a pilot. I first learned about scholarships around this time, from George Coe, who was my trial flight instructor, my secondary school friend's brother.



I applied to the next Air League scholarships and was unfortunately unsuccessful; this pushed me to gain more experience in the industry – I volunteered at a flight school, began studying aeronautical engineering at college, did work experience at a flight maintenance company, and I now work there! I applied to the next wave of scholarships, including the Honourable Company of Air Pilots gliding and flying scholarships, and I was thrilled that I had gone through to the next stage of the PPL scholarship, which consisted of recording a short video introduction about myself. I was shortly notified of my invitation to the Air Pilot's House for my interview.



To say that I was nervous on the interview day is an understatement, however; I was very confident in my ability to show off my passion for aviation and flying. The interview process was very fun, and it was really nice to meet a few of the other interviewees, the group activity calmed my nerves down and allowed me to get to know the others. I remember walking out of the Air Pilot's House thinking that I had not done well enough, I felt like I could have done better, however my worries were soon proved wrong the next day where I received a call from Dominic, one of my

interviewers, that I had been awarded the scholarship! I was shocked and speechless about what had just happened, but also extremely excited for a summer of flying. I started my training at the beginning of July, after my college exams, at Euro Flight Training (EFT), where I had volunteered before. The aircraft I flew is a Fuji FA200, a Japanese trainer aircraft, a rare sight in the UK.

I planned to complete an average of one theory exam per week, so that I was on track with the deadline. I picked up most of the general handling very quickly in the first week, including my first radio call (a lot less scary than anticipated), and passed the first exam, Air Law – doing lots of practice questions definitely helps a lot to reinforce your knowledge! After 3 more exams and 15.5 hours into the course, I had my first solo flight, which was thrown onto me by my instructor (George) who jumped out the aircraft after a few dual circuits. I was nervous but I trusted my ability to fly solo circuits as George was happy for me to do it, it was an exciting and rewarding sensation that I will never forget.



After some solo consolidation and dual advanced handling, I moved onto navigation, which sounded daunting, but turned out to be a lot less difficult than I had anticipated – chair flying, and proper planning made the navigation portion a lot easier. I remember the first time I used the whizz wheel it felt like magic! A highlight from my navigation flights was seeing the Red Arrows flying past, it felt so surreal hearing them on the radio. Further into the navigation, I did my first solo land-away at Shoreham, after 2 more exams, then closely followed by my QXC after my FRTOL practical, which seemed to



come very quickly. The QXC was the most memorable portion of my PPL training – my route was Lee - Shoreham – Thruxton – Lee, and over 200 nautical miles. I particularly enjoyed eating lunch at the café at Shoreham Airport while I went over the plan for the next leg. It felt so weird to be flying so far on my own, the feeling of freedom you get is priceless!

The final weeks were especially tough due to poor weather, which led to many cancellations, delaying my skills test. My skills test was finally booked in, much to the thanks of everyone at EFT. The skills test was a standard format; with the first half being navigation and diversion, then being assessed on different stalls, steep turns, and PFLs (which I was most nervous about). I was over the moon when my examiner shook my hand once we had landed and told me that I had passed, all the hard effort during the summer definitely paid off.



This summer has been the most challenging, yet most fun and rewarding of my life. There were some tough moments where it felt like finishing was not possible, but it all worked out in the end.

Tips:

- **Eat and sleep:** My most important tip; both are essential for keeping your mind sharp during theory and flight training. I found that when I was properly rested, I could complete the same amount of study in much less time.
- **Planning:** I planned the week ahead every Sunday, making sure to do at least 15 hours of studying per week, and to have one rest day (which was not always possible, but really good to have). Having a clear daily plan made it much easier to stay on track and monitor my progress. I also created a plan for the entirety of my training on Excel, with a 2-week cut-off period at the end.
- **Practice Questions:** Doing lots of practice questions made the exams a lot easier for me, I did all the practice papers on Pooley's E-Learning before I sat a real exam, I found that a lot of the practice questions came up in the real exam.
- **Navigation Planning:** Navigation can be tough, especially at the beginning as you will have little spare mental capacity. I would recommend spending a couple of hours planning each flight, going through each leg and chair flying it, thinking of what ATSU to contact, and what to request also. Triple check your PLOG too, as there was an occasion where I accidentally wrote the reciprocal heading down!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to SkyDemon for their incredible generosity in funding my PPL journey, and to The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for making this opportunity possible. Their support has allowed me to achieve something I've dreamed

of for years, and I am truly honoured to have been awarded this scholarship. My dream of becoming a pilot has now become reality, it feels surreal to be a licensed private pilot at the age of 17. I am excited for what the future has to offer!

I would also like to express my appreciation to Ciarán, my PPL buddy, who was a 2024 PPL scholarship winner, who has always been there to answer my questions and offer advice, and he's checked in on me often to see how things were going, his encouragement and help have meant a lot and really kept me going through my training.

I would like to thank everyone at EFT, including my instructors; Mark, Helena, Johnathan, and especially George Coe (below), who has greatly supported me throughout my aviation journey since the beginning.

