



Mark Young (BALPA BF) Scholarship

Final Report - Maximilian Dodd

2026

Introduction & Gliding Foundations

My aviation journey began with a glider flight at East Sussex Gliding Club (ESGC), just five days after my 16th birthday. Having never experienced gliding before, I joined the club knowing that I wanted to learn to fly, but without really knowing how much I would come to enjoy flying gliders. As I am sure many people who have experienced winch launches will appreciate, the first few were certainly an experience!

It was my gliding experience and passion for aviation that led me to look for scholarships in order to pursue a career in aviation. Therefore I applied for the 2025 gliding scholarships, with the hope of getting awarded a scholarship to push me to solo, but sadly I never made it past the initial application.

Despite this minor setback, I continued gliding at ESGC and eventually went solo pretty much exactly 13 months after my first flight. Having gone solo in a glider and having completed various aviation industry work experiences, I was confident that I had improved my application and so when the 2026 applications opened, I knew I had to apply for the PPL scholarships.

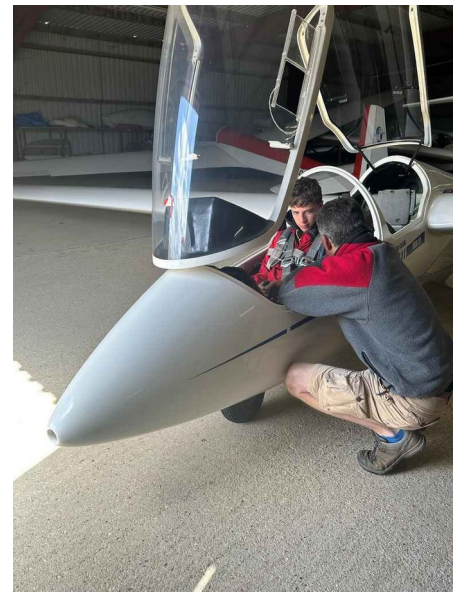


Figure 1: My first time in a glider, a K21 at East Sussex Gliding Club

The application process

As it is a handwritten application, I began initial drafts online and then once I was happy with these answers, I tried my best to write them down on the piece of paper neatly. Last year it took about 4 attempts to send it off; however, this year my handwriting was more consistent and I only had to write 2 applications. After carefully ensuring I had prepared the application exactly as specified, I sent it off and hoped that this year I would at least hear back. After a couple of weeks I was amazed to find out that I had progressed to the next stage and now had to record a video interview. This took longer, as I did countless takes, until I eventually found a structure which I felt worked. Finally I was happy with the video, ensured it was under a minute in length and sent it off.



Figure 2: Interview day in London, April

After a few more weeks I received another email and was even more astonished that I had been invited to Air Pilots House for an in-person interview! When the interview date turned up I felt like I was well prepared and went in trying not to be too nervous, but I was most definitely nervous. However, the interviewers were lovely and I very quickly found that I had no reason to be nervous as the interview ended up being pretty much a chat about my goals and passion for aviation. I expected to find out if I was successful a day later, as I had read the previous years' reports and they all stated that they got a call the next day saying they were successful. However, the interviewers did say it would take about a week for me to hear back so I didn't think too much of this, and realised I was just overthinking it. Whilst at school I received a phone call, but my phone wasn't on silent mode so I ended up getting told off, and I thought it was simply a spam call. However later that day the same number called so I answered the phone and it was Kat, one of my interviewers, who informed me that I had been successful and was awarded the scholarship!

The fun part

Training up until First Solo

I started flying the day after my final A-level, which was Edexcel Maths Paper 3, so to get flying after such a fun paper was amazing (Maths Paper 3 was not fun at all).



Figure 3: Taxi back after first solo



Figure 4: My initial instructor on the left, and a new instructor on the right, Cedric, who sent me solo and later became my main instructor

The flying lessons started off recapping the basics which I had learnt from gliding, and the general handling of the aircraft was very similar to that which I learnt from gliding, but not as much rudder was required, which was something to get used to. Doing my PPL at Shoreham was fantastic, as there was no airspace for us to clear before starting to do manoeuvres, we could just exit the ATZ, and quickly were able to begin practising, which was a huge help in saving time. This meant that along with my gliding experience, all the general handling principles came quite quickly. It took some time to get used to flying again after months of bad winter weather, followed by A-level exams.

This was followed by circuits, which initially went really well. I found that we quickly moved onto emergency procedures in the circuit, such as flapless landings, EFATOs, and glide approaches and shortly after I was ready for my solo release flight. However, it wasn't one of my best flying days. My landings weren't really on the centreline and my round-outs just weren't to a solo standard, so I wasn't sent solo that day. It was obviously disappointing, but I knew exactly what I had to work on, and after two more circuit sessions my instructor was happy to recommend me for another solo check.

This time I flew very well and had the benefit of flying with a CAA examiner, which meant I learnt a lot as he gave me new perspectives which I had never been told before. Perhaps the biggest lesson I took from him that day was how to improve my lookout, which was to solo standard but could've been more thorough. Once I was up solo it felt amazing to be solo in a powered plane!

Solo Consolidation and Navigation

I enjoyed flying with the CAA examiner, who is called Cedric, so much and felt that his instructional style was perfect for me, as he was very oriented on how to be as professional as possible, whilst also being incredibly good at teaching me how to fly. I am extremely thankful that I changed instructor to Cedric because he made every lesson feel super valuable and was a joy to fly with. The weather post solo proved lovely and I managed to get my solo circuit consolidation completed quickly and then found myself moving onto the navigation stage of the course.

Navigation was something I had never done in my experience gliding and I did not really know what to expect. I did not anticipate that the principles of dead reckoning would work so well. I found myself amazed when during my first navigation exercise, I flew the heading I had calculated for that time, and ended up



Figure 5: Art Deco terminal building at Shoreham

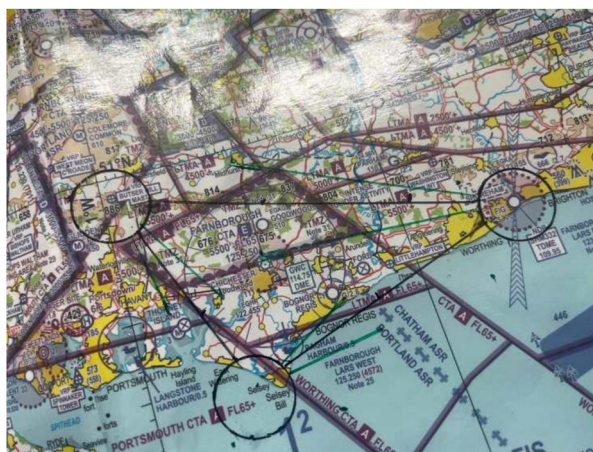


Figure 6: Triangular navigation route from Shoreham

pretty much exactly where I needed to be, for each leg. The other aspects of the navigation flight made it somewhat demanding, as I had never made so many radio calls. As the navigational aspect of the flight went so well, I was lulled into a false sense of security, as I expected the rest of the navigational flights to go just as well, though I quickly found that no matter how much time I spent preparing for the navigation exercises they would not always go as smoothly as desired.

First Solo Navigation

As I flew more navigation exercises, I then did a practice diversion which went smoothly, after which Cedric felt I was ready for my first solo navigation flight and so I was sent off! The route was simple: Shoreham – Petersfield – Thorney Island – Shoreham. This was because Thorney Island is a very easily identifiable

feature. I did not know how clear it would be to me when I departed, however once I turned onto my new heading after reaching Petersfield, I saw it clearly ahead and the rest of the navigation was extremely easy as once I reached Thorney Island it would have been near impossible to get lost as all I had to do was fly east along the coast and I would have eventually made it back to Shoreham.

Land Aways to Lydd and Southend Airports

Following my solo navigation flight, we moved onto doing a land away, in order to prepare me for my 150 nautical mile qualifying cross country, in which I had to do two full-stop landings at aerodromes other than Shoreham. First I flew to Lydd dual with Cedric, which went smoothly. However, Cedric and I were both disappointed to find that there was no longer a cafe at Lydd but a lounge meant for private jets, so when we arrived in anticipation of having a cup of tea before returning to Shoreham, we were left incredibly disappointed. After this flight I then flew to Lydd solo and then very quickly found myself nearly ready for my QXC. However, first Cedric and I flew to Southend as this was going to be my second airport which I had to land at.



Figure 7: High wing Cessna 152 for great countryside views



Figure 8: Fair weather cumulus

As Southend lies within controlled airspace, my first flight there was certainly an experience. Despite having full ATC at Shoreham, flying into Southend gave me my first ever experience of flying in controlled airspace which meant I had a much higher workload than usual, though luckily for me, my first flight to Southend was with Cedric. This meant that despite being unfamiliar with flying in controlled airspace and not knowing what to completely expect, I quickly realised it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be. When we landed at Southend, we were incredibly disappointed as although it is a commercial airport which receives commercial traffic, Cedric and I were unable to find somewhere to get a cup of tea, seemingly a common theme amongst all the airports I flew to this summer. After this flight Cedric was happy that I was ready to go for my QXC. Despite not having gone solo to Southend, we decided that in order to conserve hours I would just go for the first time on my QXC.

Qualifying Cross Country – Unforecast bad weather issues



Figure 9: Happy to have made it to Lydd

To make an attempt at completing a QXC, you need nice weather, as your instructor needs to be happy that you can make it round safely. However, the good weather which the summer had given us disappeared, and we were left waiting for a good weather window to complete the QXC as one depression followed another across the UK. This was the perfect opportunity for me to sit down and focus on finishing off the Flight Performance and Planning theory exam, and the FRTOL practical exam. Therefore, despite being a little irritating the poor weather window only helped me finish off my remaining exams.

My first QXC attempt plan was to fly to Southend, followed by Lydd and then making it back to Shoreham. I set off confident that the good weather forecast was accurate. On the way to Southend the weather was lovely. Having landed at Southend and spent what felt like an hour trying to find someone to sign my QXC form, I checked the weather and decided it would be worth calling Cedric as I felt the weather had deteriorated with unforecast thunderstorms developing in the vicinity of Lydd,

and wanted to discuss the option of just returning to Shoreham. We ended up picking this option and so the QXC got delayed further but it was a useful lesson to review decisions and adapt to the actual weather. So in the end I did not end up going to Southend for the first time on my first QXC attempt.



Figure 10: Bombardier Challenger 3500 at Southend for the Jacksonville Jaguars



Figure 11: Selfie with my Cessna 152 at Southend

Finally a day came, between depressions tracking east, where a second attempt at a QXC was possible. This time we decided to go the other way round to make it more fun. It was a lovely day

for it, and the whole cross country went extremely smoothly, in fact I even had time to stop at Lydd for a little snack! Now that I had completed my QXC it was onto final skills test revision, before actually sitting the skills test.

Skills Test

The preparation for my skills test started off relatively slow. With the forecast not looking wonderful over the next week or so, my instructor Cedric and I went through some ground school about the test, such as diversions, navigational techniques and all sorts which proved valuable on the exam. He also made it clear what the expectations of the exam were which significantly increased my confidence on exam day. During this time of poor weather I also practised emergency procedures routinely on my cardboard bomber, which proved helpful when I got flying again as I knew all of the procedures off by heart.

Once the weather improved I was able to get the final preparation for the skills test completed, which included revising aspects which I had not covered in a while, such as stalling, steep turns and PFLs, which definitely took the most time as I struggled with these the most when returning back to general handling revision. After a few hours of revision Cedric was happy to recommend me for the skills test and then before I knew it the day arrived.

My skills test went well. I kept in mind two principles which Cedric had told me would help me out in the skills test, these are as follows: ABC (Always Be Correcting) and to never let one mistake put you off for the rest of the test. I used these throughout the test, but perhaps the best example was when I was given a practice diversion, my initial heading I calculated was off, however I recognised it and corrected it and this was perfectly acceptable to the examiner.

After some general handling, such as steep turns, stalling and simulated IMC, I flew back to Shoreham for some circuits. However, the wind wasn't the nicest to me as I had a 12 kt crosswind throughout my circuits, which was the most I had flown in before, which certainly made the circuits a little more lively!

Once we landed and I shut down the engine, I was absolutely ecstatic to find out that I had passed and that all the hard work I had put in across the summer had paid off! To make things even better my skills test was just one day before the scholarship deadline so I was extremely relieved that I had completed it on time, albeit a little later than I would've liked.

Final Remarks, Reflection and Future Plans

This summer has truly been one of the best summers of my life, as it has been an amazing experience and a great way to start my journey into powered aviation. Therefore I'd like to thank everyone involved, this includes the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, the BALPA Benevolent Fund, everyone at Shoreham Aviation, my HCAP scholarship buddy Matt, my instructor Cedric Peate whose instruction and advice about how to be a more professional pilot made the challenging task of getting a PPL over summer so much easier and quite frankly made me have a lot of fun along the way!

I'm now planning to continue gliding, building light aircraft hours and working within the aviation industry, with the long-term aim of becoming an airline pilot, hopefully via a sponsored cadet scheme.



Figure 12: My inspirational instructor Cedric "Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance" and "Destination Disaster" amongst his phrases



Figure 13: PPL Skills Test Passed 1 day before the deadline!