

Grace Kripigans Wigley PPL Scholarship 2022

The summer of 2022 has been one I'll remember for a very long time. It seems surreal that I'm actually a fully qualified Private Pilot! I must start with a massive thank you to not only the BALPA Benevolent Fund for sponsoring me to complete my PPL but also to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for all their help. I'm extremely grateful to have been given this wonderful opportunity which otherwise would not have been possible – thank you!

After an unsuccessful scholarship application in 2021 (at which I only had 12 hours under my belt), I decided to focus on making my application stronger to re-apply the following year. Alongside my degree in Aerospace Engineering with Pilot Studies, I joined the Liverpool University Air Squadron as an Officer Cadet. Most importantly, during the chaos of Covid, I managed to log some more flying hours (including my first solo and a few solo nav routes) at my home flying school, the POM Flying Club. As a result, when I re-applied for the scholarship in 2022,



I had 37 hours of flying in the bag and many more experiences to talk about. After a tough but enjoyable selection process, I was absolutely thrilled to find out I'd been selected for a PPL scholarship!



Post first solo – July 2021.

I'm very grateful to have found such a brilliant flying club at my local airport (Humberside). The instructors (notably Neil McKenzie and Dave Edwards) and club owner (Chris Dale) have been excellent from day one. Although I thoroughly enjoyed all of my training, my two stand out flights were my first solo and the solo QXC. I never in a million years thought I'd be able to fly an aircraft on my own, never mind happily navigate a 150nm round trip with 2 land aways.

As I'm sure all pilots will agree, there is absolutely no comparable feeling to flying alone in an aircraft for the very first time. I found the joy and excitement of lining up for take-off without my instructor completely overshadowed any underlying nerves. Although it was only one circuit, it was absolutely brilliant and I couldn't help but smile knowing I was the sole pilot in command of the aircraft. It was truly thrilling and an experience I'll never forget.

After 11 months off (due to funding, Covid and university), I finally re-started my flight training in August 2022. A few consolidation dual/solo nav flights later, I was ready for my solo cross-country. The route was Humberside – Peterborough Conington – Leicester – Humberside. The additional challenge of not having air traffic control at Peterborough & Leicester like I had at Humberside made the overhead joins all the more interesting. Other hurdles along the route included crossing the combined RAF Coningsby/Waddington MATZ (where the Eurofighter Typhoons are active), the RAF Wittering MATZ, East Midlands airspace as well as avoiding multiple glider sites and parachute drop zones. I would be lying if I said I wasn't nervous on the day of my solo QXC. Although I knew what I was doing, the idea of flying such a distance alone was definitely daunting. However, after I took off from Humberside and was on my way, the nerves were soon replaced by excitement. Overall, the flight went very well and I absolutely loved it – even the 16kt crosswind awaiting my return at Humberside.



The mighty POM during my QXC – September 2022.



Post QXC (very windy!) – September 2022

My absolute favourite part of the day happened in the morning as I approached RAF Coningsby and had two Eurofighter Typhoons overtake and pass in front of me with two more breaking away into a circuit on my left. So yes, for a split second, I technically flew in formation with two of the world's most advanced fighter jets.

The week after my QXC, I completed the final theoretical exam and passed the FRTOL exam. A few days later (and fortunately on a lovely sunny September morning), I passed my skills test. I thought I'd find the skills test nerve-wracking and stressful but much to my surprise, it was one of my favourite flights I've done. As soon as my examiner and I took off, I felt completely at ease and more than ready to be tested on everything I'd learned throughout flight training. Learning to fly has been an unforgettable experience and one I'll forever be grateful for. With this licence in hand, I'm excited to explore the world of General Aviation as well as hopefully start working towards achieving a Frozen ATPL next year.



North Lincolnshire from above – August 2022.