

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots
PPL Scholarship 2021
BALPA Benevolent Fund: Eric Lane-Burslem Scholarship
Luke McConnell – Final Report



The summer of 2021 was different to every summer, the summer where I became a pilot! Being a pilot is the only thing I've wanted to do and being involved in the Air Cadets and aviation from the age of 12 has confirmed that for me. While being an Air Cadet I managed to complete the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme, managing to go solo in 12 hours in Dundee, this was an amazing experience because it gave me a taste of being in command of an aircraft. From then, I knew I always wanted to advance my training and better myself. With completing courses inside the Air Cadets like the Qualified Aerospace Instructors Course, I eventually gained a strong knowledge on airmanship and flight theory.

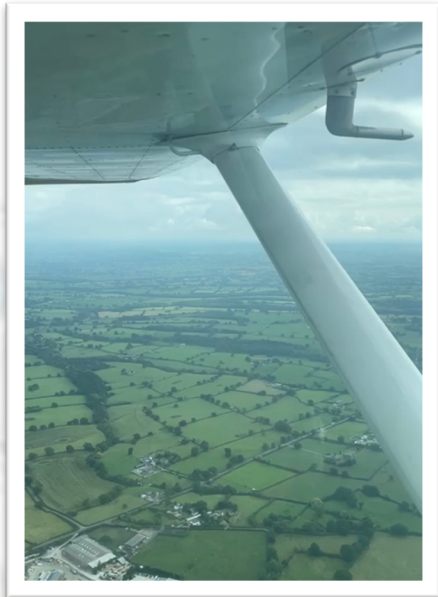
When I heard of the opportunity to achieve my PPL with the Honourable Company of Air Pilots, I applied immediately hoping for an interview. I was over the moon when I saw the e-mail drop into my inbox telling me I had an interview. I was nervous but excited as this was a new experience as I had not experienced an interview in the aviation world. Sadly, due to COVID, the interview was online, and I didn't get the chance to go to London. However, I still feel like I went through the true interview experience and came out on the other side successful.

Starting my training at Westair at Blackpool Airport, I firstly met with my instructor Oliver and the other wonderful members and instructors of the flight club. I was also lucky enough to also share the experience with another PPL scholar, David, who was great as we both assisted each other during different stages of our PPL and experienced all the highs together. I started with aircraft handling, learning how the aircraft reacts to different controls and how to adjust it to my desires. Furthermore, learning how to fix the aircraft back to straight and level



flight when it's taken out of its comfort zone. An example of this was stalling, which was one of my favourite parts of aircraft handling as it gave me the chance to use almost aerobatic manoeuvres to put the aircraft back to straight and level.

Next, was circuits. I had already flown circuits with the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme, but it was a daunting experience as it was the first time I was properly mixing with other aircraft at Blackpool. Initially, when being shown how to fly a circuit, it seemed like an information overload as there was lots of thing to check and adjust to make a safe circuit, including looking out for other aircraft. After much practice, I gained the confidence and skill to go solo again. On a perfect summer's day in July, that's what I did, it was a great feeling being back in command of an aircraft and made me confident that I would be able to complete the scholarship in the required hours. After many solo consolidation hours, I reached my favourite part of flight training which was navigation. I enjoyed this part the most because I finally felt like I was using the aircraft for it's used for, travelling long distances in a short amount of time.



I started with very small navigation exercises, only going on flights that were an hour long to Fleetwood and Kendal. I was lucky to have my flight training at Blackpool because the surrounding area and flying area had some picturesque views, especially when flying



through the Lake District. After having practicing flying small navigation exercises and learning new navigation techniques it was time to start long navigation journeys of multiple hours. I started with a circuit from Blackpool, Kendal, Long Preston and Clitheroe. This was my first experience talking to other radio stations and so radio telephony had to be perfect. Initially, I found this difficult but again with plenty of experience I finally became confident and quite knowledgeable quickly. Then, I started to land at different airfields, for me these were Sleaf Airfield in Shropshire and Caernarfon Airport in Wales near Anglesey.

It was great to also the Red Arrows at Blackpool for the air show at the Isle of Man. On the day I was flying a solo navigation flight and was lucky enough to take off while they were waiting at the runway

holding point. Taking off in a Cessna 152 while 9 Red Arrow pilots watched was a unique experience.

After practicing land away I was finally ready for my qualifying cross-country flight which was by far my favourite flight of the whole scholarship. When I arrived on the day the weather was looking unfavourable, with a low cloud base and showers in the vicinity. After a couple of hours, it cleared up and so I was able to start my 150nm journey to Sleaf and Caernarfon. The sights were breath taking, near Sleaf I was able to see how nice the English countryside can be. When I arrived at Sleaf, I enjoyed a half hour break enjoying the other aircraft arriving and departing. Leaving Sleaf, I was on my navigation leg to Caernarfon which was the prettiest. Being able to see the Welsh coast from the sky made me realise how lucky I was to get onto the scholarship and how grateful I was to be given the opportunity. Then heading into the Menai Strait, I had to keep at a low altitude for the overhead RAF aircraft from RAF Valley, which is where I aspire to be one day. While at Caernarfon, I enjoyed a nice meal from the café and headed home for Blackpool. When I landed back at Blackpool the feeling was almost euphoric like I had finally lived a dream. Then, I knew I was close to my licence with just my Skills test left.



Due to adverse weather at Blackpool, it took around 2-3 weeks to finally get the chance to do my skills test. But, even with the long wait, I was confident I knew what I was doing and knew all the procedures necessary to pass. After the flight was completed, I got the good news of passing of which meant I had finally completed my training for my PPL. This was a great day for me to finally call myself a pilot I dream I have had since the age of 12.



In the future, I aspire to fly in the RAF and with the completion of my PPL I am now one step close to hopefully achieving my dream. I would like to thank the Honourable Company of Air Pilots for their continuous support during the whole scholarship and hope to maintain the already great relationship we have. To the BALPA Benevolent Fund who funded my PPL in the name of Eric Lane-Burslem who's story is inspiration and highlights the importance of safety of all aviators around the world. Also, Westair at Blackpool as all the instructors were all willing to

help at any time and gave advice when needed. And, for helping me meet my deadline for the scholarship and organising for it me, which made the experience much better.

This is only the beginning of my flight training and hope to advance my training to become a professional pilot in the RAF.

Sky's the limit!

