

Flight Instructor Scholarship 2026

My background

General aviation has a habit of reminding me that however much I think I know, there is always more to learn. There is always another way to become a safer, more capable pilot — there really is no ‘completed’ point.

I have been a keen GA pilot since 2017, when I put together the funds to gain my PPL and was quickly bitten by the bug. I progressed through my night, IMC and tailwheel courses before eventually gaining my CPL in 2024.

I enjoy the learning process — what could be better than a flying course? (Perhaps with the exception of the CPL!) — but just as much of the pleasure for me comes from sharing flying with others: taking friends, family and neighbours flying, explaining what is going on, and watching someone else get something from an experience I already love.



Instructing had therefore been a goal of mine for some time. It seemed to bring together two things I particularly enjoy about general aviation: continuing to develop my own knowledge and skills while helping someone else develop theirs.

It was with that in mind that I applied for the HCAP Flight Instructor Scholarship in 2026.

The selection process

The selection process itself was thorough. After submitting my application and a short video, I was shortlisted for an interview at Air Pilots House in London. The interview included a ten-minute briefing on a subject of my choice, followed by questions from the panel and a technical discussion. Knowing how much I wanted the award certainly made me nervous at first, but the panel did their best to put me at ease and the whole process felt constructive.

For my briefing I chose to give a short presentation on decompression sickness, drawing on my previous experience as a Divemaster. It turned out to be a useful early reminder that explaining a subject clearly to someone else is quite different from simply understanding it — something that would become a recurring theme throughout the FI course.

A few (painful) days later I was absolutely delighted to learn that I had been awarded the scholarship. Without this support, the FI course was something I would almost certainly have deferred for another few years. Instead, a long-standing ambition suddenly became a very real prospect, and I began looking forward to starting the course with On Track Aviation at Wellesbourne.

Pre-course preparation



In the weeks before the course I tried to broaden my flying experience as much as possible. Most of my recent flying had been on PA-28s so I deliberately spent time on different SEP types, did some introductory spinning and aerobatics and made a point of getting some practice flying from the right-hand seat. I also dusted off the PPL theoretical knowledge books and gave them a thorough read-through.

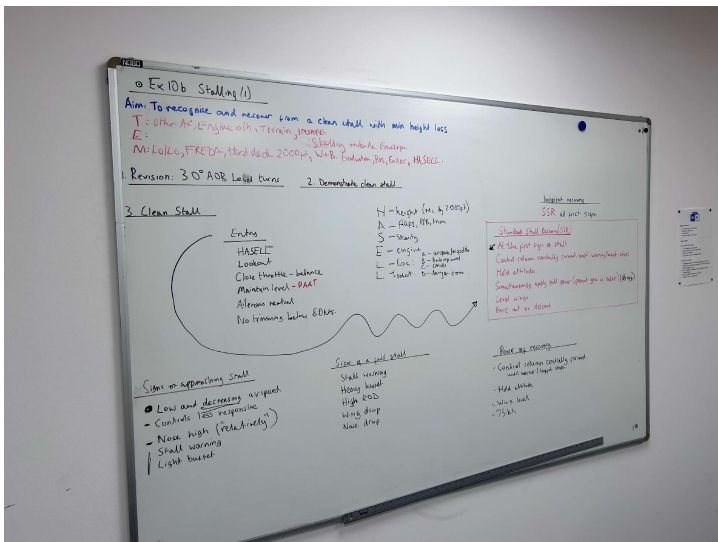
One of the course prerequisites is to pass an FI pre-entry flight test. That was a useful checkpoint in itself: a chance to demonstrate that the basic flying was already at a sensible standard before the focus shifted from flying accurately to teaching someone else to do so.

It also produced a few useful reminders from the outset — notably, “*you need more rudder!*” and “*don’t rest your feet on the floor - you’re not driving an automatic car!*” Both I’m sure will be phrases which find their way into my lessons in future.

Bloggs on

I started the course with On Track Aviation at Wellesbourne in July, choosing to split it into three two-week blocks. That schedule allowed me some time between each block to let things sink in and prep for the next one. More importantly, it made it vaguely possible to fit the course around three children on school holidays, an employer who still expected me to turn up occasionally and a very understanding spouse.

Much of the course used a ‘give’ and ‘give-back’ format: first being briefed and taught an exercise, then briefing and teaching it back after the instructor had transmogrified into ‘Bloggs’, our fictional student.



It is fair to say that Bloggs’ enthusiasm frequently exceeded his finesse and what he lacked in raw talent he certainly made up for in control deflection. Over the course he did begin to slowly improve — I’d like to think with at least some help from me.

On the ground, a huge amount of my learning happened in giving the ground brief: how to structure a lesson in practice, explain only what was needed while going deep enough on the key points, check understanding throughout and afterwards give a constructive debrief rather than simply producing a list of faults.

The workload in the air was a challenge at times. As well as following your lesson plan and all of that talking (!), you are keeping track of the student, maintaining situational awareness, monitoring the weather, the airspace and the clock. Planning the detail such to not end up fifteen miles from the airfield with five minutes of the lesson left was something I learned early.

One of the harder habits to break in the beginning was the urge to tidy up every small error. It became apparent that sometimes the better lesson comes from allowing an error to develop just far enough for the student to recognise it and learn from it. The skill is in deciding what matters, what can be left alone and what needs focus.

I was fortunate enough to spend time back-seating and mutual flying with other FI candidates, including qualified military instructors and serving commercial captains. Watching people from very different backgrounds – and vastly more experienced than me – tackle the same teaching exercises was hugely valuable and reinforced that there is no single ‘perfect’ instructional style.

Towards the end of the course, things really began to fall into place. I was becoming more comfortable with my own teaching style in the classroom, my confidence handling the aircraft had improved dramatically and the individual exercises had started to join up into something that felt much more coherent.



In a Spin



Spin entry and recovery was one of the more memorable parts of my final week.

I had had some exposure to spinning in a Robin R2112 prior to the course, which had left me feeling rather green, so I was apprehensive about how these exercises would go.

Luckily, the spin and recovery characteristics of the C152 are a little more benign.

Spinning an aircraft and coherently teaching a recovery is certainly a challenge though, and hopefully not one I will need to repeat too often!

I did come away from the exercise with a new appreciation for the light and spinnable baby Cessna, so I very much look forward to operating one again.

The Assessment of Competence

Finally, after 30 hours in the air, more than five weeks at the school, and an amount of time spent thinking, reading, researching and revising that I would rather not calculate, the course built towards the Assessment of Competence.

By that stage there had been mocks, long briefings, plenty of revision and more than a little overthinking. The long flying days, travel, preparation and sleepless nights spent debriefing myself had started to catch up with me. I was looking forward to getting it over the line, getting home and getting some rest.

The day of the AOC came: CAVOK, VRB04 and about as benign a weather picture as I could have hoped for. It was a long and demanding day, but the examiner put me at ease and we maintained a good sense of humour throughout — which was probably just as well when during start-up the checklist escaped from the cockpit through the partially open door and made it halfway down the taxiway!

From there the assessment settled down and the whole course genuinely felt as though it had come together. Hearing the words “congratulations, you’ve passed” afterwards was an enormous relief and a very satisfying end to several intense months of work.



Onwards



While the ink is not yet dry on my rating, finishing the course and qualifying as an FI feels much more like the beginning of the journey than the end of one.

Much of my flying has been shaped by the passionate and knowledgeable instructors, grass-roots clubs and enthusiasts who keep GA going and I would like to play my own part in that in turn.

Armed with my temporary certificate, I am already looking forward to the next stage: instructor standardisation and getting on the books at my home airfield, some revalidation and refresher flying with local pilots, and exploring opportunities with youth flying organisations.

This process has changed the way I think about my own flying and reinforces the point I started with in this write-up. There really is no “completed” in aviation.

Teaching forces you to examine things you may have taken for granted, explain why something works rather than simply know that it does, and constantly question whether there is a better or safer way to do it.

That is the mindset I hope to instil in my future students — helping them become safer, more confident and better informed, with a strong foundation in airmanship and sound decision-making.

I am enormously grateful to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and to BALPA for making the course possible. Without the scholarship, I would almost certainly not have had the opportunity to progress at this stage of my life

alongside family and career commitments. I am hugely fortunate to have had an experience that has already changed the direction of my flying and I hope in time to repay that generosity by giving something back to the wider GA community.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Ian Stephenson, John Eburne, Alan Newton and the rest of the team at On Track Aviation for their unfailing professionalism, patience and excellent sense of humour, and of course to my supportive family who have endured the process alongside me and put up with my frequent 6am departures to Wellesbourne.

Finally, I must thank the irrepressible 'Bloggs', who has spent the last few months providing a seemingly endless supply of instructional opportunities and demonstrating exactly why students need good instructors.

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Before applying, I read just about every previous scholarship report I could find on the Air Pilots website and it feels slightly surreal to be writing the end of one myself now. If somebody considering applying for a future scholarship happens to be reading this in the same way, my advice is simple: **apply.**