

Air BP Sterling Scholarship 2025 –

Fred Kingsland

Aviation has been my passion for as long as I can remember, but it truly began on my first commercial flight to Ireland. I was fortunate enough to be invited into the cockpit, and from the moment I stepped inside, I was captivated by the sophistication of the flight deck. I vividly remember placing my hands on the throttle as the captain turned to me and said, *“I can see you sitting beside me one day, helping me fly this plane.”* From that moment onward, I knew that flying was what I wanted to do. I have never looked back since.

I grew up in Meopham, Kent, though my journey later took me to North Wales after entering foster care. Throughout the challenges of a fractured upbringing, my passion for aviation became my golden ticket — a constant source of motivation and hope. During every academic milestone, whether it was my GCSEs or A levels, I reminded myself that the flight deck was the ultimate goal and that I should never forget the captain who once believed in me.

When I turned sixteen, I booked my first trial flight. I still remember how nerve-racking it was as the instructor ran through the pre-flight checklist; it seemed impossible to remember so many procedures. Little did I know that just two years later, I would be confidently captaining an aircraft on my own.

My scholarship began on the 8th of June 2025 at Merseyflight ATS in Hawarden, Chester — which also happened to be my birthday. After waiting about a week for decent weather, I must have brought some birthday luck with me to the flight school. I had some prior flying experience, so the first few lessons focused on consolidating basic manoeuvres, and before long, I was back in the circuit. Despite having completed just one circuit previously, the thrill of taking off and then almost immediately configuring for landing never fails to get the heart racing.

The weather wasn't always on my side throughout the summer, but eventually, the perfect week arrived — starting with my first solo flight on the 11th of August. What a feeling that cannot truly be put into words! I vividly remember my checkride instructor giving no indication as to whether I'd be going solo, but then hearing, *“G-KI, request book-out for a student solo in the circuit,”* was an unforgettable and rewarding moment.





From then on, it was full steam ahead. The highlight of my training came with my Qualifying Cross Country on the 5th of September, flying from Hawarden to Halfpenny Green (Wolverhampton) and then on to Gloucester. It was a smooth, confident flight that helped me realise how far I had come and that all the hard work, dedication, and perseverance I had put in had finally materialised.

As the typical September weather crept in, flying began to slow down, and the nerves started to build about whether I would finish the course in time for the deadline. I made sure all my groundwork was complete, including earning my Radio Telephony Licence, and then waited anxiously, continuously “armchair flying,” until one early morning text message arrived with the long-awaited go-ahead for the mock test. The following day, on the 24th of September, just one day before the deadline, I was fortunate enough to complete my Skills Test. What a relief, and what an incredibly rewarding way to conclude such a meaningful journey. Though in reality, the journey is only just beginning. I never would have imagined that the captain’s words would become a reality so soon, as I will be joining the British Airways Speedbird Pilot Academy in March 2026. This past year has undoubtedly been the most challenging of all, but with every low came countless highs that made it all worthwhile. To all aspiring pilots out there: never give up. You can achieve anything you set your mind to, no matter your background.



I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone at The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for making this incredible opportunity possible, and to Air BP for generously funding the course. My sincere gratitude also goes to Merseyflight ATS for their outstanding instruction and unwavering support throughout my training.

A special thank you goes to my PPL buddy, Kristoff, a fellow Speedbird Pilot Academy Pilot, who has been nothing but supportive throughout this journey, both professionally and personally. I truly couldn’t have done it without his encouragement.

I look forward to meeting the rest of The Honourable Company of Air Pilots team and becoming an active member of their alumni community, where I hope to help inspire the next generation of aspiring pilots