

Swire Scholarship 2024

Inspired by brilliant instructors I have had over my time in aviation, I was motivated to explore the path of becoming a Flight Instructor. I became aware of the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and decided to apply.

After an unsuccessful first attempt, I tried again the following year and was pleased to hear I was put through to the next stage. The task was to create a 2-minute video on 'Integrating theoretical knowledge into the PPL syllabus'. I talked about how the practical flying connects all the pieces of knowledge we learn from the theory, using my niece's puzzle set as a means of illustration.

Success! I was through to the final stage. This involved a trip to London for a panel interview covering my personal experience and reasoning for applying, followed by a presentation and technical questions. The focus of my presentation was on electronic conspicuity and gliding competitions; an ongoing topic in the GA world and something I was deeply passionate about. After a tense few days of waiting, I was thrilled to hear that I had been awarded the Swire Instructor Certificate Scholarship.

The British Aerobatics Academy was my chosen training school due its strong reputation and idylic location close to where I was living in Cambridgeshire. As I was working full time, I had to complete the course on a part-time basis initially. Luckily, the airfield was only 5 minutes away from the office, so I was able to use my lunch break to prepare the board brief, ready for the actual flying exercise after work.

The FI course consists of 125 hours of ground school and 30 hours of flying. The ground school element covered the methodology of teaching and learning, and involved delivering a series of remote lectures over Zoom on a variety of topics of the examiner's choice. These topics ranged from Icing, to How a Wing works, through to Navigation techniques. Then came the practical flying side of the course. My first teaching lesson started with drawing up a pre-flight brief on the whiteboard, where the importance of different coloured pens became apparent! To everyone's relief, my whiteboard handwriting gradually improved throughout the course, albeit in block capitals.



The biggest take-away at this stage, was the importance of an effective pre-flight brief. Not only does this aid the student's learning, but it also primes the instructor for the sortie so that they are clear on the objectives. It also helped me rehearse the patter structure before getting in the aircraft.

The practical flying element was flown using the Cessna 152 and the PA38, along with the Grob 115D for a few of the exercises. I soon found out the art of teaching and flying simultaneously was not easy. On top of flying the aircraft accurately, the instructor has to 'patter' the exercise, maintaining situational awareness and keeping an eye on things like weather, NOTAMS, fuel etc. It is far too easy to get carried away on the 'Straight and Level' exercise, for example, and end up miles away! Piers, my instructor, often threw in student errors for me to identify and correct. The key

learning point here was to ensure the student has completed the exercise before critiquing, giving them ample time on the controls without interruption.

I found the most challenging exercise to teach by a mile was the spinning exercise. Reeling off the pattern in time with the recovery actions, whilst the world is rotating around you and the aeroplane losing height rapidly, took some practice!

Before I knew it, the Assessment of Competence flight had arrived, marking the culmination of two-months of hard work. Once the CBs cleared, I prepared a pre-flight brief to teach the examiner Exercise 16 'Practice Forced Landing'. The flight continued with a teach of Exercise 15 'Advanced Turning' and finally Exercise 11B 'Spinning'. Following the debrief, I was tasked to prepare a long brief on Tailwheel Flying. I presented using a set of slides, a whiteboard, and even found a model BF109 to illustrate the tendencies of tailwheel aircraft. Then, success! I passed with only a few observations.

This has, without doubt, been the most intense but enjoyable course I have flown to date. I have significantly improved my handling skills and deepened my knowledge of all aspect of aviation. I am now eager to apply what I have learnt into practice, teaching LAPL students initially, and later PPL once I finish my exams later this year. The learning does not stop here though; teaching styles is something I will develop with experience.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Swire Foundation as my sponsor and the amazing team at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots. Without this opportunity, I would not have been able to fund this course at my stage in life. I cannot wait to put the skills I have learnt into practice to share my passion with others and teach the next generation of pilots!

If you are reading this considering whether to apply, do it. I could not recommend it highly enough.

