

Grayburn Scholarship 2026 – James Deeke

My aviation journey started with the RAF Air Cadets, where I took to the skies for the first time in a glider at RAF Little Rissington and soared above the beautiful Cotswold countryside. My love of aviation had well and truly begun. A few years later, I was lucky enough to be awarded a gliding scholarship with the Fleet Air Arm Officers Association. This not only allowed me to step into the world of aviation, but also taught me the fundamentals of flying, invaluable preparation for learning how to fly in a Cessna 152. Shortly after, I ended up continuing my gliding training with 612 VGS, as a flight staff cadet, which has been one of the biggest highlights of my cadet career. This only deepened my desire to pursue a career as a military pilot.

Before my A levels, I had heard of a scholarship offering 40 hours of flying to contribute towards obtaining a PPL. In early 2026, I decided to apply for the first time to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots' PPL scholarship. I was on the approach to my A level exams, when to my absolute delight, I received the email that I had been offered an invite to an interview! After the interview I received the news a few days later that I had been granted the scholarship and all I remember in that moment is being lost for words – a rarity for me!



I chose Enstone flying Club based out of Landmead Farm airstrip not only due to it being local but also because after meeting the owners Paul and Angela, I believed that they were committed to support me to acquire my PPL. After finishing my last A level exam, I was strapped into the Cessna by Monday morning - ready to commence flight training. The first phase of flight training began with general handling of the aircraft and focussed on the demanding circuits at Landmead. In just 8 hours I would be flying the Cessna solo for the first time.



With what seemed to be the endless nights of revision for the exams, with at least one exam per week, I was rapidly progressing forwards. Before I knew it, I was on to navigation, with the classic map and compass technique! I found this part of the course most enjoyable as I flew along the Berkshire/Wiltshire landscape at 2500ft with a map in one hand and the other on the controls. I ended up doing my first solo navigation going to Landmead- Greenham Common – Devizes – Landmead; making sure to avoid Salisbury plain on the way to Devizes!

The land away felt like such a milestone. Landing at Kemble for the first time became quite humorous as it felt that there was just too much runway for what this small aircraft is used to. The solo land away gave me

the confidence I needed to start preparing for one of the biggest milestones of them all which is the cross country. On the 8th August I set off, to fly the planned route around Birmingham airspace. I remember flying underneath the airspace when I saw a huge airliner taking off. But the excitement did not stop there. My first destination was Wolverhampton airport, a busy environment for a student pilot, where multiple aircraft were in the circuit. Nevertheless, I landed safely and for some reason I had to park next to the Douglas DC-3 and adjacent to a Spitfire starting up its Merlin engine (I really could not complain as a flying enthusiast). It was then off to Leicester where a crosswind had to be fought but due to excellent training from my instructor it did not prove to be too challenging. My last leg ended up being an afternoon flight going past Draycott Reservoir where I used to fish with my dad when I was younger and then past Silverstone. As soon as I saw Landmead, I felt the sense of relief as it was time for a standard overhead join to land back home.



It was now that I had to prepare for the skills test. This included general handling revision covering stalls, turns and practice forced landings. My instructor and I focused on navigation taking the Cessna to the Welsh landscape over the beautiful but challenging terrain. The point in time came when I felt ready to take the final test. With 40 hours in the Cessna 152, I undertook my skills test

on the 24th of August 2026. The 2-hour long skills test, which went very quickly, marked the day I gained my PPL.

I would like to thank Paul and Angela at Enstone flying club for making this possible and being so welcoming and supportive. It has been an absolute delight to fly with the club with such a friendly flying community.

My instructor Richard Pitts, who has a wealth of experience, supported me throughout the process. He sacrificed a lot of time to ensure that I could fly whenever it was possible. He is not only my instructor but also now a friend and I cannot thank him enough for his support and dedication. He has taught me so much in what has felt like such a short 8 weeks, and I want to thank him for all the time he has personally given throughout this journey.



Finally, thank you to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots and to the Grayburn scholarship for the support you have given me. A special thank you to Jack, my mentor, who has given me advice and support throughout the entire process. The scholarship has facilitated the opportunity to allow a childhood dream of becoming a pilot into a reality. The scholarship has not only taught me so much about flying but has also changed me for better. I gained a PPL at 18 – something I never thought that would happen to me, and I am so grateful to all those that made it possible.