

Hannah Whelan Grayburn Scholarship

I have had an absolutely incredible summer gaining my private pilots licence. I have loved aviation since discovering AirFix kits as a child; I joined the Air Cadets as soon as I could, and the University Air Squadron following that. Finishing the PPL has been a dream come true. I am so thankful to the generous scholarship providers and the team at the Honourable Company of Air Pilots (HCAP) for making the dream happen, and supporting me through it. I couldn't have done it without them.

The PPL course consists of 9 written exams, one practical radio exam, and the practical flying training with a practical exam at the end. The practical flying training is roughly split into two broader topics – how to fly the aircraft itself, and then navigation - how to get from A to B. I trained with Enstone Flying Club in the north Cotswolds. Flying training starts with local flights to learn the basics of the aeroplane. I loved taking flights around the Cotswolds and seeing the local sights. As I progressed through the course I started taking longer flights to different aerodromes – personal favourites were Turweston, Sywell and Shobdon. (If it's a longer flight always leave time for a cup of tea at the visiting aerodrome.) There are several milestones in the course – the first one is the first solo. Nothing prepares you for the feeling of your instructor stepping out of the plane and leaving you alone! The second milestone will be your first local solo flight (leaving the aerodrome circuit) and your first solo land-away, building up to your solo cross country. This is a 150 nautical mile flight to two different aerodromes, solo. My solo cross country was a brilliant experience and massively boosted my confidence as a pilot, as I had to practise making some decisions about weather and cloud. I generally just realised all of it was coming together. My final skills test was another positive experience, I was given a route to fly which demonstrated all the skills I'd learnt, including performing a ground briefing to test my theory knowledge. It was one of the best days of my life when I was told that I had passed!



Alongside the flying training, I was sitting the theoretical exams. These can be quite challenging and I did feel like I was back at university some weeks! Different people find different topics harder than others. The most



challenging part of aviation for me is keeping on top of all the extra information. The flying part is fairly easy, operating the plane becomes second nature like driving a car. But it is thinking about the radio, the weather, air law, navigation, human factors, lookout technique, passengers, various aerodrome procedures all while flying the plane is where things get tricky. It is also really important to practise the radio. I found this a challenge as my flying club was at an unattended aerodrome, so I didn't get the same practise with ATC. Youtube videos were really helpful in practising the radio calls and passing the theoretical radio exam.

One of the best parts about the HCAP scholarship is that you get to join a cohort of other scholars on the journey. We had a whatsapp group through the summer which was an incredible source of support, and then we all get to meet at the end of the summer for the awards dinner. We were all assigned a 'buddy' who was a previous scholarship winner, and I know many of the scholars have found a good friend in their buddies – myself included! We also get membership for the Young Air Pilots organisation run by HCAP, which is fantastic to connect with younger people interested in aviation. It is challenging sometimes to find younger

people around flying clubs due to the financial constraints of flying training, but the Young Air Pilots provides a great social outlet. Finally, we also get membership of HCAP, which opens up a full social calendar of dinners, events, speakers and a community of incredible aviators. You get out what you put in, so throw yourself into the community!

My long term dream is to be an aerobatics instructor for general aviation. I'm fascinated by aerobatics, the theory behind them and how aircraft need to meet certain structural conditions, and they are just the most incredible fun. The path to get there will be fairly long – I first need to achieve my aerobatics rating. I then need further solo hours before I can apply for the flying instructor course, and some additional specialist experience and training before I can teach the aerobatics rating. I also love teaching others, and teaching your passions is a really rewarding way to practise them. In the meantime I'm looking at ways I can build my solo hours as quickly and cost-effectively as I can. I'm also looking to try my hand at some gliding, to keep expanding my knowledge of the aviation world.

Some advice I would give to anyone thinking of applying:

- Read the application instructions VERY carefully – pay attention to the small details around formatting. There are so many applicants – don't discount yourself by making silly mistakes. Take great care in every stage of the application process and make sure you are displaying how much you want it.
- Don't discount yourself from applying for any reason! There is no age limit on the application and there is no requirement to have specific flying/aviation experience. Just explain why you love aviation and let the panel decide. You also don't have to see a career in military/commercial flying, you can have other aviation-related goals (as I explain above.)
- While many scholars are in school or university, it is also perfectly possible to complete the scholarship while working full time – this is what I did alongside another scholar. You have to be extra organised with your time and be prepared to use up all your annual leave, and maximise your evenings and weekends. I got the support of my employer ahead of the course so they could be more flexible around me taking short notice annual leave in favourable weather conditions.
- Recognise what a commitment the scholarship is – completing a full PPL in 4 months requires extreme dedication, particularly if you are juggling other commitments like work, studies or family. You have to be fully proactive in managing the journey – working closely with your flying club and instructors, speaking to HCAP the moment you encounter issues, being resilient on weeks there is bad weather. The British weather WILL mess up your plans at some point on the course, so leave yourself plenty of time to complete the various stages. Only apply if you are going to give 100% to the course.
- Book your medical as soon as you hear that you have been successful for the scholarship. You are not able to begin the course without it, and there may be something crop up that needs further investigation which could take time.
- Don't feel disheartened if you need a couple of extra hours on top of the 45 hours to achieve the licence (although to note these will need to be self funded and are not part of the scholarship). Completing a licence in 45 hours is tough, and is the very minimum legal number of hours, so there is no shame in taking a couple more hours to build up your confidence ahead of the final test.
- You will probably hit a 'wall' at some point. Around the time you start navigation training is common. You start wondering how on earth you'll fit it all in your head, and master the skills required in a short number of hours. It can also happen following a bad/stressful flight. The 'wall' really took me by surprise - I thought as long as I worked really hard I wouldn't struggle. Use your buddy, your instructors and other flying club members to help you through – they've all been there!
- Some of the theoretical concepts are really hard to master, and there will still be things by the end of the course that you are not confident on. This is normal, as by the time you get the PPL you are a 'baby' pilot – by no means an experienced one! Aviation is a lifelong experience-gaining process and you will never feel like you've finished learning. When I got my licence I did have a moment of imposter syndrome where I couldn't believe someone thought I was ready to fly alone!