

James Wilson - Air Pilots Benevolent Fund 2024 PPL scholarship report

Background

Aviation has been a lifelong personal pursuit. I have always harboured a passion for aviation and a desire to become a pilot. This desire grew exponentially when I joined the Air Cadets, where I experienced my first flight in a light aircraft. Following numerous applications, I was awarded a place on the Air Cadet Pilot Scheme with Tayside Aviation in Dundee. This included 12 hours flight training and culminated in my first solo light in the Aquilla A211. I fondly remember the feeling of being trusted to pilot an aircraft on my own.

Following the completion of my A-levels, I opted to start university studying Aeronautics and Astronautics. While at university I was fortunate to be selected for Southampton University Air Squadron; further strengthening my relationship with aviation. In 2023, I completed my placement year as an RF Systems undergraduate engineer, during which, I placed my 3rd consecutive application for a HCAP PPL scholarship following 2 unsuccessful attempts in the years prior.



Figure 1: Gliding with the Air Cadets in 2019.

Flight training

In the summer of 2024, I was selected for the much renowned Honourable Company of Air Pilots PPL Scholarship. I was ecstatic to hear the news and in disbelief that I had finally been successful. I undertook my training with Leicestershire Aero Club with whom I began my PPL 5 years previously. Flight training started in early summer with an average of 2 lessons per day.



Figure 2: 1st solo navigation flight.

The first section of flight training was focused on general aircraft handling and remained familiar due to my prior experience. Following this, I progressed to build solo hours in the circuit, becoming more confident with procedures and landings. In due course, work started on standard overhead departures and subsequently navigation flights. Navigation brought some exciting challenges, involving landing at varying aerodromes with different procedures and layouts. My qualifying cross-country flight was the highlight of my training, involving a flight from Leicester to Wellesbourne, onto Duxford then returning Leicester. The pinnacle of the journey was being asked by the FISO to “park next to the Vampire” at Duxford aerodrome. Stepping out of the aircraft on the apron was an amazing feeling, and something I could only dream of when visiting the museum as a tourist 6 years earlier.



Figure 3: de Havilland Vampire at Duxford Aerodrome

My PPL concluded with a skills test. This was an opportunity to demonstrate the abilities I'd acquired during the previous 7 weeks of training, proving my competency as a pilot. The flight lasted over 2 hours, on a busy, warm Sunday afternoon. My nerves and thermals made the flight all the more challenging, however the weather made for some stunning views. Upon landing I was delighted to hear I'd passed, marking an exciting end to an amazing opportunity.

Future aspirations

Following the completion of my PPL, I intend to finish the final year of my degree, Aeronautics and Astronautics. Subsequently, I intend to work as an engineer, saving funds to achieve further licences, completing a modular route towards my ATPL. I eventually intend to work as a commercial pilot for a company such as NetJets whilst maintaining membership of The Honourable Company of Air Pilots, contributing to the organisation who so generously assisted me at the very beginning of my career.

Appreciations

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots and The Air Pilots Benevolent Fund

The PPL scholarship has allowed me to make significant progress towards my ATPL and finally gain my PPL 5 years after commencing my training. Thank you to both The Honourable Company of Air Pilots and The Air Pilots Benevolent Fund for granting me such a profound opportunity.

Leicestershire Aero Club

My course was completed in 7 weeks, an achievement that wouldn't have been possible without the help of all the staff at Leicestershire Aero Club. Thanks to all who helped me progress through the syllabus so quickly.