

Jordan Smith
The Sir Sefton Brancker Scholarship (Air Pilots Trust)

Looking back, I can't pinpoint the exact moment I realised I wanted to pursue aviation, but I can say it's something I've had interest in from a very young age. Being awarded this scholarship has helped to bring me closer to a lifelong goal and reach a huge milestone in the process, being issued my PPL(A).

When I joined the Air Cadets aged 13, I knew very little about aviation besides what I'd experienced from going on family holidays growing up. That all changed when I had my first 20 minute AEF flight at RAF Benson and had the opportunity to get my hands on the controls of a light aircraft. From here the path and the vision became clear.

Coming into the scholarship at the start of the summer my Air Cadets' flying and knowledge, my gliding scholarship and my aeronautical engineering degree all provided a good foundation upon which I could build. However, I knew the odds were stacked against me. I had 9 theory exams, 45 hours of flying and 2 practical tests to complete over the summer alongside working full time as cabin crew and at the mercy of the British summer weather.



C152 & C172 used during training



Inside one of the PA28s I flew

Prior to the flying commencing, I was able to get a headstart with my theory and complete the first two examinations (Air Law and Operational Procedures). My flying training was conducted from Elstree, a small but very busy aerodrome to the east of Watford in North London. The busy airspace created a challenging environment from the start but I'll never forget my instructor saying "if you can fly in and out of Elstree you can fly anywhere". Challenge accepted.

My first few lessons consisted of general handling, getting to grips with the aircraft controls, the effects they had and how to manipulate these effects for a desired result. Once I had those skills locked in, circuits came next. A big part of my success this summer was down to the fact that my instructors had me fly in a range of aircraft types: Cessna 152, Cessna 172 and PA28. This meant that I gained an

appreciation for the difference in flight characteristics, but also aircraft availability was mitigated as a factor when it came to booking flights.

After 3 hours in the circuit, I hit the first stumbling block in my training. Whilst downroute in the Caribbean, Hurricane Beryl made landfall in Jamaica and our flight home was cancelled and postponed by 3 days. As a result I missed out on four flying lessons and lost some momentum on my training. My determination to succeed meant I spent hours in my hotel room arm chair flying and visualising my circuit patterns to ensure I could hit the ground running once I made it back home. Clearly my practice was worth it as I returned to Elstree on the 8th of July and was sent on my first solo after a handful of 'check' circuits with the head of training.



First solo



Navigation planning

After some solo consolidation and flying various approach types in different aircraft, I was ready to progress onto the navigation section of the training. A navigation brief and a practice navigation plan gave me the knowledge I needed to plan my first dual navigation exercise, a short flight to Royston and back. Getting familiar with local landmarks played a crucial part in learning to reorientate myself whenever I became unsure of my position. Luckily the surrounding area was filled with a number of obvious landmarks. The most important being the lake right next to the aerodrome at Elstree!

After a few more dual navigation exercises I was ready to venture out beyond the familiarity of the circuit as Pilot in Command! A short flight out to the Stockenchurch Tower for my first solo navigation exercise in the morning followed by a dual landaway to Stapleford in the afternoon. By this point I had covered the majority of the training syllabus with only a few things left to cover. To be efficient with lessons and hours we covered items such as diversions and instrument flying during our longer navigation exercises to Leicester and Duxford.

Ready for my QXC and navigation plan set, the only obstacle became the weather. Up to this point in my training I had gone 30+ hours without a weather cancellation. The eventuality was inevitable. So we returned the following day to try again. Good visibility, clear skies, slight winds but well within aircraft and personal limits. Leg 1: Leicester via Princess Risborough, Leg 2: Duxford via St Neots, Leg 3: Elstree via Brookmans Park.

I completed the training syllabus with hours to spare so returned to circuits to reach my 10 solo hours requirement and had a mock test covering general handling in preparation for the skills test.

On 18th September I arrived at Elstree both nervous and excited for the final hurdle on this journey. At 11:30am I started my engine. At 1330 I landed, shut down and nervously awaited my result. I passed! 3 months of hard work and sacrifices had finally paid off. With no time to waste I headed straight to the office and we began the admin process to submit for the issue of my licence.

“I’m a pilot”, a phrase I have longed to say and thanks to the Honourable Company of Air Pilots it is something I can say with pride. I’ve learnt a lot about myself during this period and more importantly my passion for aviation has grown immensely. I look forward to what the future holds and cannot wait to embark on the next stage of my aviation journey.



QXC complete