



The Bob Dawson Scholarship – BALPA Benevolent Fund

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The 26th of November 2016, that was the day I took my first ever trial flying lesson. For as long as I can remember, I had always known that I wanted to be a pilot, but that day made me realise it was what I needed to be. The following few years consisted of me spending whatever money I could earn during the school holidays on flying. The PPL would be the first of many steps taken to reach my goal. Needless to say, these lessons were few and far between – some 7 hours flown over the course of two years, and by the time I moved away for university it was apparent that this would be no easy feat. It was with a heavy heart I decided to hang up the logbook for some time and focus on my studies. Unfortunately flying was not a feasible venture for me during this time due to its expensive nature. I would have to wait until after university to restart this initial goal.

I first found out about this scholarship in 2020 when the applications for that year were opened. A classmate of mine at the time had previously applied for and won it. I remember drafting my application 5, 10, 20 times before finally sending it off. Due to the pandemic, that year's scholarship was cancelled and so it was back to reality for me. The following years consisted of working in various aviation roles, from passenger services to aircraft design, all while completing my degree in aeronautical engineering, and all while continuing to apply for every cadetship and scholarship under the sun, including this one! This year was different, however. After years of perseverance my time had finally come, I was awarded the PPL scholarship from The Honourable Company of Air Pilots.

I began my training with Redhill Aviation Flight Centre in early June, shortly after moving over from Ireland and taking up lodgings in a nearby house. It was an entirely new experience for me, spending each day at the airfield studying, planning, and most notably, flying. Within my first week, I had already logged more flight hours than I had accumulated before moving over. Every day was busy, with the majority of my time spent studying for the PPL theoretical exams which I completed over the course of my training. The training ran smoothly from start to finish with the exception of a few bad periods of weather. Starting off with the basics, familiarising myself with the effects of controls, straight and level flight as well as climbing and descending. This was a very exciting period for me, relearning all that I was taught many years ago, and developing an even stronger passion for flying.

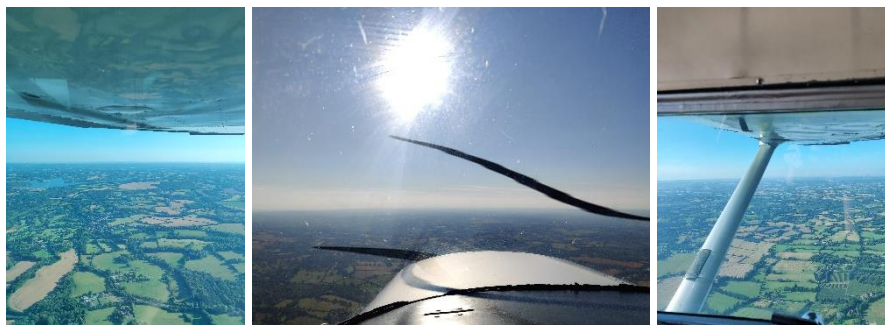
Before long I was finished with the initial general handling aspect of the PPL course and was ready to start doing circuits. Redhill has two grass runways which were both utilised throughout my training. The 18/36 runway has a challenging circuit profile due to its close proximity to Gatwick airspace, incorporating a very short final which provided a great learning experience. It was at this stage of the process where I gained confidence communicating on the radios and focused on perfecting my short field, flapless and glide landings in order to be signed off for my first solo. The day finally arrived on the 24th of June. After being checked out by another instructor within the school, I took to the skies by myself for the very first time. What a feeling! There is truly no other like it. It was all over before I knew it, an incredible milestone and a memory that will stay with me forever.



First solo complete!

It felt surreal for the remainder of that week while I was completing my solo consolidation hours. Getting to go flying by myself every day was a blend of freedom and responsibility, with the sky wide open in front of me and the steady sound of the engine keeping me focused. Each take-off felt like an achievement, and every landing reminded me how much I was improving with each flight. It was then time to commence the navigation portion of the training. This phase got off to a slow start due to a period of poor weather in the southeast of England which provided ample opportunity to get through the ground school requirements and thoroughly plan out the sorties yet to come.

Navigation was by far the most enjoyable aspect of the course for me. My first solo landaway was to Lydd airport on the southeast coast of the country. The excitement of flying to a new airport, navigating unfamiliar areas, and communicating across different frequencies made the flight both enjoyable and rewarding. This landaway was swiftly followed up by my qualifying cross country, taking me northeast of Redhill flying through uncontrolled airspace to Earls Colne airfield in Essex, before tracking south and obtaining a zone transit through Southend controlled airspace en route down to Lydd. Over 150 nm and nearly 3 hours of flying later I returned to Redhill, after what I would consider to be the best day of flying I have had so far.



Some snaps from the air.

With close to 10 hours remaining before hitting the required amount for this licence, my instructor planned out exactly how best to utilise this time to prepare for the skills test. These final few hours were spent revising all aspects of the course as well as reaching the required number of solo hours. One of my fondest memories from the summer was flying from Redhill along the southeast coast for 2 and a half hours. The weather was perfect, with calm winds and excellent visibility. The radios were busy with many others taking advantage of the good conditions, and I felt like I was part of something special. The aviation community is truly one that I am proud to belong to.

After completing a mock skills test and a final brush-up on my air work, I was ready to be recommended for the real deal. The wait felt agonisingly long, almost two weeks had passed by before I was able to sit it. There was plenty of time to get nervous, however, I knew I was ready. My instructor, Sharandeep,

had me well prepared, so I knew there was nothing to worry about. The big day finally arrived. My test was in the afternoon, after what had been a pretty uncertain morning weatherwise. Thankfully, the skies cleared up a few hours before I was due to fly. The winds were a little stronger than I would have hoped for my test, but it was nothing I hadn't faced before. After the pre-flight briefing with my examiner, we headed out to the aircraft. I was in the zone, feeling relaxed and ready for the two hours that were to follow.

We started with the navigation portion of the test, incorporating a diversion after completing the first leg of the journey and being assessed on my radio navigation. Then onto the instrument flying segment which was followed by stalling, steep turns, spiral dive recovery and a simulated forced landing. Once the general handling was complete, we returned back to Redhill for some circuits. I was asked hypothetical emergency situation questions en route. It was all over in an instant, after taxiing back to the flying club and shutting down the aircraft after a very enjoyable flight, my examiner, Jill, told me that I had passed. I was, as one would expect, over the moon! I had finally achieved what I had set out to do all those years ago.



PPL Skills Test Passed! Myself and my instructor, Sharandeep.

Looking back on it all now, I know that I have made younger me very proud. But this is only the beginning. The journey to the right hand seat is a long and eventful one, and nobody said it would be easy. I am looking forward to continuing working towards this life ambition of mine. It is great to know that I have now made an enormous leap in the right direction! For now, I am working as an engineer with Ryanair, and will continue to build up my hours while also applying to multiple airline cadetship programmes.

I would like to thank BALPA for sponsoring this fantastic scholarship as well as The Honourable Company of Air Pilots for facilitating it. I would also like to thank Redhill Aviation for providing a top class training facility to complete this course. In particular, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Sharandeep, my instructor for the duration of the training. I highly encourage anyone with a passion for aviation to apply for this scholarship. It has truly been life-changing, placing me in a position I never thought possible so early in my journey. After 4 years of applications, I finally achieved what I set out to do. It is true what they say, the only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary!