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So, you want to be a microlight pilot ?

Learning to fly is one of the most rewarding of challenges, whether you're learning to fly at 16 or 60. Students will always remember their first solo and their final flight test for the rest of their lives. How does the NPPL (M) work?
Ex BMAA chief executive, Chris Finnigan explains.

How much does it cost to learn to fly a microlight? How long will it take? Do I need a medical? What is involved?
The cost of microlight flying training varies widely, depending on a number of factors, firstly you will need to be happy that you comply with our flight & safety requirements:

Flight & safety requirement

The minimum age is 14 years, maximum weight 16 stone, you should be between 4'6" & 6'4", agile enough to get in & out of the aircraft, no previous flying experience is required.

You should seek medical advice if you have previously suffered a heart condition or other medical complaint such as back or neck problems, epilepsy, giddiness, high blood pressure, or vertigo, flight training would not be advisable for pregnant mothers.

All flights are at the instructor's discretion and you should advise your instructor before your first flight of any of the foregoing or any other conditions that may effect flight safety, although colour blindness and type two diabetics are acceptable conditions.

- **Age.** Generally, the older you are, the longer it takes.
- **Weather.** In a good year for British weather progress can be made quickly, but when a spell of bad weather comes along delays are inevitable.
- **Availability of student.** If you can train whenever the weather is suitable, including summer evenings, you will make better progress than if you only fly at weekends.
- **Availability of instructor.** If your instructor has many students you will be competing with others for his/her time.
- **Natural ability.** The more natural ability you have, the faster you will progress.
- **Funds available.** If you are working on a tight budget, you will only progress at the rate you can afford.

The National Private Pilot's Licence (NPPL M) microlight rating requires a minimum of 25h flying training, 10h of which must be solo, for the pilot to have no operational restrictions. A licence with restrictions can be achieved with a minimum of 15h flying training, including 7h solo. These restrictions include not being able to carry passengers, only being able to fly in very good weather conditions, and being restricted to flying within 8nm of your own airfield.

Before your first solo, you will need a doctors medical certificate, its not a full medical and is based around the HGV medical requirements.

The hours quoted above are the minima that only the most naturally talented young students achieve. The rest of us normally take a little longer. A few achieve their licences within weeks, others take months, and those on a tight budget sometimes take a year or two.

Costs

When budgeting for flying training, it is wise to calculate the cost of the minimum number of hours required and then add between 50 and 100% of that cost, depending on how confident you feel of your own ability.

Hourly rates start at £135.00 per hour, this includes a pre flight and post flight briefing and 1 hours flying instruction and realistically, a budget of £3500- £4500 should cover your flying training part of your licence.

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Ground school

Don't forget ground school. In addition to flying training the student pilot must also learn a number of ground school subjects that are considered vital to becoming a safe and competent pilot.

The best results are always achieved by a combination of attending lessons and private study. Those who are not particularly confident of their academic ability should not be put off by the thought of having to go back into the classroom and pass exams at the end of the ground school training.

All ground school subjects relate to what goes on in the air while flying and they are much easier to understand when put into this context. The subjects taught in ground school and confirmed by written examinations.

Exams

There are five exams covering the following subjects:

- Principles of Flight
- Aviation Law
- Aviation Navigation
- Aviation Meteorology
- Airframes & Engines
- Aircraft Instruments
- Fire, First Aid, & Safety Equipment
- Human Performance Limitations

1. The Airframes & Engines and Principles of Flight exams ensure that the student pilot understands how the aircraft flies and how its engine and control systems work. They also cover aircraft performance and the many factors that can affect it in the air and when taking off and landing.
2. Aviation Law training ensures that the pilot understands how the law applies to him or her, including when and where they can and cannot fly, what documents they must have in their possession, what rules they must obey and how they must ensure that both they and their aircraft are capable and safe for the flights they wish to make.
3. Aviation Navigation training on the ground provides the pilot with the necessary skills and knowledge to plan before a flight and then fly to that plan, knowing at all times where they are and how to get where they want to go. The more navigation is included in flight planning on the ground, the easier it is to navigate once in the air.
4. Aviation Meteorology lessons give a sufficient understanding of the weather and how it affects the performance and safety of the aircraft, for the pilot to know when it is safe to fly and when it is not. This includes being able to anticipate and plan for changes to the weather during a flight, especially if it is a long cross-country or touring flight.
5. Human Performance & Limitations is a relatively new subject in aviation and covers all the different factors that can affect the way a pilot performs in flight. These range from the effects of tiredness, alcohol, drugs, lack of oxygen and cold, to misperceptions and misjudgments caused from stress, anxiety, complacency or confusion. The knowledge acquired in studying this subject allows the pilot to factor in his or her own performance, and importantly its limitations, into their risk assessments before flying.

The exams must be passed before the pilot can achieve a license even if the General Flying Test of skills has already been passed. Most ground school exams use the multiple-choice system; each question has a range of answers from which the student must select the correct one. The navigation exam involves planning an imaginary flight using a chart and navigation 'tools', taking into account wind speed and other weather conditions given in the exam scenario.

Costs

If you self study and just sit the exams you should allow £150.00 to cover the five exams, retakes are charged at £30.00 ea. For a full ground school package allow £1000-£1500, this will give you ground schooling in all subjects plus the five exams.

For more information visit the BMAA website at www.bmaa.org or the National Private Pilot's Licence website at www.nppl.uk.com where the syllabus is available for download.