



NEW £21 MILLION FUND FROM BRITISH AIRWAYS TO PUT 200 ASPIRING PILOTS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS THROUGH TRAINING

News / Airlines



British Airways announced a £21 million investment to give up to 200 prospective pilots the chance to follow their dream of flying for a commercial airline without the worry of self-funding the £100,000 cost of training, opening the door to being a pilot to more people than ever before. The Speedbird Pilot Academy aims to attract the very best talent for the future generation of pilots while boosting social mobility and diversity within the airline's pilot community. The airline works with community groups to help encourage applicants from people who may have previously been put off from applying due to cost.

Launched last year and open to applicants annually, the Academy is already training 100 future British Airways pilots who managed to beat off competition from more than 20,000 candidates to have the cost of their tuition paid for by the airline. Funding was in place for an initial 100 places on the 2025 programme, which has now been increased to 200. It takes two years to complete training and become a qualified First Officer with the airline. British Airways currently employs around 4,000 pilots.

Sean Doyle, British Airways' Chairman and CEO, said: "I'm incredibly proud of the Speedbird Pilot Academy and the opportunity it provides to those talented individuals who have held a lifetime ambition of becoming a commercial airline pilot, but have perhaps found it difficult to independently fund their training. The standard of applicants we see for this programme are consistently high so as part of our commitment to attracting the very best candidates from right across society, we've increased the 2025 cohort to give as many people as possible the chance of realising their dream."

Ryan Street, a Speedbird Pilot Academy cadet from Stockport had dreamed of a career in aviation since he was a young boy. He joined the air cadets at the age of 12, where he rose to the rank of Cadet Warrant Officer, before beginning work at Manchester Airport for a ground handling company. He held various roles including a ramp loader, an aircraft dispatcher and a load controller before being selected for the Speedbird Pilot Academy.

Ryan said: "Applying for the Speedbird Pilot Academy and being selected for such a highly-competitive opportunity was a dream come true, knowing that I would finally be able to achieve the career I had always wanted. Without the assistance British Airways provided with this cadetship, I might not have ever been able to afford the current training costs, so I am thankful to them that they are able to provide this wonderful opportunity for those that might never have been able to get this far."

Melanie Odden, also a Speedbird Pilot Academy cadet from Hertfordshire, said: "I have been fascinated by aviation since I was young and becoming a pilot has been a lifelong dream of mine, with the aspiration to one day become a training captain. Unfortunately, there have been barriers preventing me from reaching these goals. I started in a different career path and have a young family, with my little one now being three years old.

"When British Airways announced that they would be providing funded spaces for students on their Speedbird Academy I had to apply. I never thought I would become one of the lucky few. I am now three months into my training and it still doesn't quite feel real. It is hard work, and trying to juggle family life with study can be difficult, but I know it will be worth it and I am so grateful that British Airways is giving people a chance to realise their dreams without financial barriers."

23 JULY 2024

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