

# Young Eagles – aviation passion *and* safety

Aero clubs throughout New Zealand are lining up to host a Young Eagles chapter. So what's in it for a club, the young people involved – and aviation safety?

In early March, 16 teenage pilots descended on Timaru Airport for the 2018 Flying New Zealand National Championships.

This compares with nine last year, and seven the year before.

David Saunders, national coordinator of the Young Eagles, says that, increasingly, young would-be pilots are realising the programme offers benefits over the more traditional route of aero club training.

"Obviously, they get to fly, but they also get to visit air traffic control, sometimes an engineering base, and they have specialists come and talk to them. They become acquainted with a much wider sphere of the aviation world," he says.

"They also learn where the careers are. It's not just about recreational flying any longer. The Young Eagles programme shows them where flying can take them professionally. In an era of large growth in aviation, that's really valuable."

As in previous years, the class of '18 competed in a range of tests at Timaru, from navigation skills to their ability to find defects in an aircraft.

Seventeen-year-old Holly Lyttle picked up the Nola Pickard Memorial Trophy, for garnering the most points from the competitions.

She says having to compete as a Young Eagle has been more effective in helping her learn safety messages than if she'd learned to fly outside the programme.

"For instance, the defect competition in Timaru showed me there's a lot to pay attention to, tiny details we have to look for when we preflight. I realised it really pays to know your aircraft."

William Winspear, from Auckland Aero Club, says there were a number of well-hidden defects.

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National coordinator David Saunders pointing out to Young Eagles at the Richard Pearse memorial, how Pearse's flying machine was more like a modern aircraft than the Wright Brothers' model.



"It's about finding a reason *not* to fly. You have to be thorough enough to be able to find something that may put yourself and your passengers in jeopardy.

"When you can't find that 'something', you know the aircraft is safe to fly."

The Young Eagles at Timaru agreed that in the heat of a competition, a lesson is perhaps more effectively learned than when it's embedded in a classroom textbook.

"That's one of the advantages of belonging to Young Eagles," says David. "They haven't done anything that intense before, and they don't know what they don't know. But suddenly they realise, 'Hey, I do need to know this'."

David says the Young Eagles learn about SMS (safety management systems) right from the start.

"We emphasise risk mitigation. Young Eagles look for and think about things that could go wrong, and do what they can to make sure they don't go wrong. They eliminate the hazard, or minimise it."

David says Young Eagles have an added incentive to always fly safely.

"They have a lot of fun. But if they do something really stupid and ridiculous, and endanger themselves, or other pilots, or the club, or people on the ground, they're out."

One of six Ross Macpherson Memorial scholars at Timaru, Jonathan Mauchline, says the programme fills in the gaps between theory and practice.

"There are certain parts of flying that aren't necessarily covered by flight instruction – things that get covered in exam theory. But if you're in the early stages of flying, and haven't yet done exam theory, Young Eagles fills in those gaps with really practical lessons.

"I think Young Eagles also provides us with the opportunity to build relationships with people at other clubs, which will help us in the future."

## What's in it for the clubs?

The benefits of a Young Eagles programme are not all one way.

"While it's introducing us to flying, and the aviation industry," says Macpherson scholar, Jack Dalbeth-Hudson, "it's also introducing a whole new branch of members to the aero club."

Currently, there are 16 aero clubs with a Young Eagles programme – nine of them have come on stream in just the last two years. Another four clubs are about to launch a programme, and a further three are showing interest.

The president of Flying New Zealand, Rob George, says the Young Eagles bring in energy and enthusiasm.

"Once someone has their PPL, and they've had a few adventures and ticked off a few things on the wish list, they sometimes lose a bit of motivation to fly.

"So having a Young Eagle on board often gives a good reason to stay involved with the club. The programme also generates hours for the aero club and those hours generate revenue."

The five or six Macpherson scholarships awarded each year (underwritten by the CAA, Airways, Avsure, and Aspeq) also channel up to \$20,000 back into the aero clubs.

Rob says there are also long term benefits for an aero club in hosting a Young Eagles chapter.

"Some of the Young Eagles will be involved for just a year or two. Others stay in the aero club movement, and some others might initially drift away but a little later in life – cashed up – they come back because there's maybe some unfinished business for them."

Another benefit is that although the pronounced gender imbalance in aviation is reflected in the Young Eagles, there's growing female membership. South Canterbury Young Eagles, for instance, comprises seven young men and six young women.

"Overall, young women make up about a third of members, which is brilliant," says Rob. "That's the reason that aero club membership has a slightly higher percentage of women than the rest of the flying community."

David Saunders says the benefits to the aviation industry of the Young Eagles programme is also evident in the dropout rate between solo and PPL stage.

"About 20 per cent of club members who go solo will go on to get their Private Pilot Licence.

"Among Young Eagles, that rate climbs to about 50 per cent."

Josh Collecutt, C-cat instructor at Kapiti Districts Aero Club, and himself a former Young Eagle, is keen to start a chapter there.

"The greatest thing about being a Young Eagle was having the whole aviation field opened up to me, and helping me get a feel for what it is like to be part of such an exciting industry.

"I was already hooked on flying and it was the perfect way to become familiar with more of the aviation community and get some more experience.

"Being run by passionate, experienced and knowledgeable instructors helped to reinforce, not only the excitement and enjoyment to be had in aviation, but also the importance of a safe flying environment.

"I think Young Eagles come out with a very safe and sensible approach to flying." ■

### Photo opposite page:

Young Eagles at the Richard Pearse memorial, north of Timaru, during the 2018 Flying NZ national champs.

**Front row, left to right** – Lucas Bilang, South Canterbury; Joseph Allen-Perkins, South Canterbury; Alesha Martin, South Canterbury (Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholar); William Winspear, Auckland (Club Young Eagle of 2017); Jack Dalbeth-Hudson, Bay of Islands (Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholar); Blair Stephenson, South Canterbury (Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholar); Lucy Laby, South Canterbury; Jonathan Mauchline, Wanganui (Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholar); Nathan Agnew, South Canterbury.

**Second row** – Adam Hancock, Mid Canterbury; Mariah Facey, South Canterbury (2nd, Jean Batten Memorial Trophy 2018); Holly Lyttle, South Canterbury (Winner, Nola Pickard Memorial Trophy 2018); Lucy Cooper, South Canterbury.

**Third row** – Ben Williams, South Canterbury (Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholar); Scott Wright, South Canterbury (Ross Macpherson Memorial Scholar).

**Absent** – Benjamin James, South Canterbury.

