



Learn How To
LIVE YOUR DREAM



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Why learn to fly with GCH Aviation?

GCH Aviation is the umbrella brand for multiple operations across New Zealand including:

- Garden City Helicopters (Christchurch)
- Kaikoura Helicopters, Wellington Helicopters, Coastwide Helicopters
- GCH Jet Centre & Jet Operations
- Emergency air rescue and air ambulance services, including Westpac Rescue Helicopter, ROA Rescue Helicopter, Nelson Marlborough Rescue Helicopter, and the New Zealand Flying Doctor Service

With over 40+ years of combined aviation experience, we operate across Air Rescue, Air Ambulance, Commercial, Certified Flight Training, and Tourism.

Training Benefits with GCH Aviation:

- Purpose-built facility – 9000+ m², including a dedicated Training Room with study and briefing spaces.
- Experienced instructors – all instructors also fly Rescue or Commercial operations, providing insight into Aeromedical and/or Commercial flying.
- Hands-on experience – students may participate in Commercial operations when appropriate.
- Challenging terrain – proximity to the Southern Alps, international airport operations, Control Zones, and Low Flying Zones.
- In-house engineering support – learn aircraft technical elements from experienced engineers.
- Extensive industry network – over a century of combined instructor experience offers valuable connections for CPL candidates.
- Field trips – opportunities to visit Air New Zealand Engineering School and Christchurch Control Tower to enhance practical understanding.





What is a CPL and PPL?

Whether you train in helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft, the process in New Zealand is similar.

- To carry passengers, you need a Private Pilot Licence (PPL), but this does not allow you to be paid.
- To work as a pilot, you need a Commercial Pilot Licence (CPL).

You can also add Ratings (e.g. Instrument or aircraft type ratings) for extra skills, with time and cost varying.

Flying in NZ is regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), which sets standards and rules. You'll also need to pass aviation theory exams and an aviation medical.



PPL (Helicopter) Requirements:

To sit the PPL flight test, you must:

- Be 17 years or older to sit a PPL - however can start training at 14 years old.
- Hold a Class 2 Medical from an Aviation Medical Examiner, or a DL9 driver licence medical (reduced privileges)
- Have passed all theory exams, including:
 - Air Law
 - Flight Navigation
 - Aircraft Technology / Principles of Flight (Airtech)
 - Meteorology
 - Flight Radiotelephony
 - Human Factors
- Have 50+ flight hours, including:
 - 20 hrs dual (min. 5 hrs advanced)
 - 15 hrs solo
 - Cross-country navigation & mountain awareness competency
- Pass a PPL Flight Test



Note: Holders of a valid PPL(A) only need to pass the PPL Airtech (Helicopter) exam to cross-credit.



CPL (Helicopter) Requirements

A CPL(H) allows you to fly helicopters for hire or reward (paid work). A PPL is required first, though PPL/CPL theory exams may be done in any order.



To sit the CPL flight test, you must:

- Be 18+ years old
- Hold a Class 1 Medical (Aviation Medical Examiner)
- Hold a valid NZ PPL
- Have passed all CPL theory exams:
 - Air Law
 - Flight Navigation
 - Aircraft Technology (heli-specific)
 - Principles of Flight (heli-specific)
 - Meteorology
 - Human Factors
- Have 150+ flight hours, including:
 - 35 hrs dual instruction
 - 35 hrs solo
 - Cross-country navigation & flight test
 - Mountain awareness training & competency demo
 - External load syllabus & endorsement
- Pass a CPL Flight Test



Note: Holders of a valid CPL(A) (aeroplane) only need to pass Airtech (Heli) and Principles of Flight (Heli) exams for CPL(H) credit.





Exams & Study Options

CAA requirement: all theory exams must be passed before starting solo cross-country flights (25–30 flight hours).

Study Options

- Self-study – most flexible and cost-effective (see “Theory and Medical Info” document for details).
- Private Tutoring – instructors can give limited help; for more one-on-one support, hire a private tutor (recommended providers available from instructors; payment is direct to tutor).
- E-Learning/Courses:
 - Stoneybrook Training – full helicopter PPL & CPL theory courses (individual subjects or complete package).
 - Advanced Flight Training – helicopter theory courses.
 - Canterbury Aero Club / IAA – some PPL subjects available as e-learning modules.



Helicopter-Specific Exams

- PPL Airtech – combines Aircraft Technical Knowledge + Principles of Flight.
- CPL Airtech and CPL Principles of Flight – separate helicopter-specific exams.



Notes

- Always book the helicopter version of exams where different options exist.
- If you plan to progress from PPL to CPL, consider sitting both sets of exams while knowledge is fresh.
- Exams can be done in any order, but you need full theory credit at each licence level.
- Instructors will also provide additional procedural and aircraft-specific knowledge during flight training.





Frequently Asked Questions

Is it difficult to learn to fly a helicopter?

Flying a helicopter requires time, effort, and hands-on practice. Instructors tailor training to each student to ensure maximum value from every lesson.



How long does it take?

- PPL: 55–70+ flight hours; typically 6–12 months full-time, 2–3 years part-time.
- CPL: 150–175 flight hours; 12–18 months full-time, up to 6 years part-time.

Factors affecting duration: licence type, training frequency, self-study, and learning ability. Regular training reduces overall cost and time.

Legislated limits: 3 years to complete theory, 3 years to finish flight training after last theory exam (total 6 years).



When can I start flying?

Trial Flights: any time.

Theory should ideally be completed first.

Minimum ages: solo – 16, PPL – 17, CPL – 18.

No maximum age, provided you hold a valid aviation medical.

Do I need to learn to fly a plane first?

No. Helicopter licences are standalone; prior fixed-wing experience is not required and provides limited credit toward helicopter training.



How much does it cost?

Costs vary by licence, flight hours, textbooks, medicals, exams, and flight logbooks. Contact the office for a detailed breakdown.



What do I need to go solo?

- Medical: at least DL9 for PPL, Class 2 recommended; Class 1 for CPL.
- Flight hours & competence: instructor must assess readiness; minimum hours for Robinson and Cabri G2 aircraft apply.
- Robinson Safety Awareness Training: required before first solo and every 90 days until licenced; then every 24 months for licenced pilots.
- English: instructor must confirm adequate spoken and written skills.

Can a NZ licence be converted to fly in other countries?

- CPL(H) → Australian CPL via Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA).
- NZ training counts toward FAA/JAA requirements.
- EASA conversions possible but more involved.
- PPL conversions are harder but still possible.



Are there restrictions on eyesight or age?

- Eyesight standards exist but are not overly restrictive; glasses are generally acceptable.
- Colour blindness regulations have been updated.
- No maximum age; minimum ages solo – 16, PPL – 17, CPL – 18.

Commercial Operator vs. Flight School – what's the difference?

Training with a commercial operator provides insight into real-world operations, networking opportunities, and practical experience. Building industry connections is crucial for future employment.





What happens after I get my CPL?

- **Employment:** A CPL allows you to work as a pilot, but entry into the helicopter industry can be challenging. A CPL is often considered a “licence to learn”.
- **Starting out:** Be prepared to travel or take ground roles in remote locations. Use this time to gain experience, build contacts, and demonstrate professionalism.
- **Building hours:** Gaining ~1000 flight hours is a key milestone for career progression; this is often the hardest part.
- **Training environment:** Working with a commercial operator offers practical experience, networking opportunities, and exposure to real-world operations. Seek ground roles, ferry flights, and basic commercial work to accumulate hours.
- **Instructor rating:** Consider instructing only if you have a genuine interest in teaching; it shouldn't be used solely to build hours.
- **Career planning:** Set realistic goals, focus on your areas of interest, and take responsibility for your own career growth. Ultimately, your success depends on you.

