



SFA Alumni Profile

Ben Swift - British Army, HM Royal Artillery (Aviation)



What do you do in your job?

My job involves flying the army's latest and most expensive unmanned air system, Watchkeeper. An unarmed air system that is mainly used for long range and endurance recon to the wider army but more recently the home office during the channel migrant crisis where our job was to find and assist those at risk or distress at sea. My other jobs include training junior soldiers for their future career paths, further training personally to develop my flying skills and preparing the next generation of pilots for their conversion to aviation.

How did you get to where you are?

I attended St Francis from year 7 onwards until sixth form. I was successful in gaining 4 offers to study law at university but almost at the very last minute I decided to defer offer and join the British Army with a goal to become a Pilot as it was a childhood dream. While waiting I worked very briefly as a warehouse operative and in a bar just after my second year of sixth form and within 6 months, I had attended all my meetings and was off to ATR Winchester to begin my basic training. From there I went through a lot more training and by gaining more experience within my regiment and corps, I was finally selected to be a pilot.

What has been your proudest achievement or what do you enjoy most about your job?

My proudest achievement to date is passing my FHT (final handling test) on the Watchkeeper system which allowed me to fly the system without an instructor present. Since then, I have enjoyed the challenges within the system and the dynamic was we use it. I have also enjoyed the fact that we are still finding things out about the system which allow us to use it more effectively.

What school subjects do you think are most useful to the job you do?

Maths is crucial in becoming a pilot, as we use it constantly in planning and flying, it really does break the myth that you never use complex maths in your adult life. Psychology is also important in understanding how our minds work to make us more effective pilots. History in the army is rich as it is, but within our aviation culture we make a big deal about learning from mistakes and failure, as it can only make us better and others can also learn from it.

What advice would you give to our students to help them in their career journey?

Never dismiss anything any teacher or person is trying to teach you, you never know if it will come up in your future careers and you'll wish you were listening and learned when you had the chance. Never believe your career path is set in stone, retraining and change can always occur.