On a mild October morning, Connected visited the historic Britannia Royal Naval College in Dartmouth to take a look at the initial training course for CFAVs.

The 33-strong intake, halfway through their course, march into position and line up for their third drill practice of the week. The backdrop is stunning: a vast parade square that overlooks the River Dart and the meeting place of a young Prince Philip of Greece and the then Princess Elizabeth.

The group are part of the CCF Royal Navy Officer Initial Course, which takes place over six days (run twice a year during the spring and autumn half-terms) and aims to arm the CFAVs with practical tasks and knowledge to take back to their sections. The students are from state and independent schools, with teachers, school support staff and parents taking part, aged from 22 to 57 years. Regardless of their backgrounds, everyone has come together with the common aim of wanting to become better equipped to train their cadets.

Maj Phil Green, who is based at the CCF (RN) Headquarters in Portsmouth, is the course officer. As a Royal Marine he’s military through and through, but ensures he has at least two CFAVs who’ve previously completed the course to help bring together the teaching and military worlds and deliver the best outcomes for the attendees.

This week he’s assisted by Lt Elen Harris, a section commander at Sevenoaks School CCF in Kent who had been on last year’s intake, and Lt Cdr Ian Frayne, Contingent Commander at Wellington College CCF, who’s worked with Phil for a number of years refining the course.

Elen admits it’s been a bit of a whirlwind, having only been in charge of her section for a little over a year. She says: “It’s brilliant to be here on the course for the week as you get exposed to what other schools are doing. If you didn’t come on a course like this you might struggle.”

On the first day, arriving at around 4pm on a Sunday, Phil introduces the students to the training team – three Chief Petty Officers (CPOs), who have each served for over 25 years – and briefs them on uniform and accommodation. He says: “My belief is that if we equip them with the right kit from the outset they start to feel more part of the family, a sense of belonging. We mentor them on their kit so they don’t turn up looking shabby.”

The accommodation might be their first shock, as we provide shared accommodation, very much like on board a ship.” The students want to experience what the cadets will do during camps and field days, so sleeping in a bunk is an important part of that. On the positive side, one or two remark that it’s better than camping.

LEARNING THE ROPES

For some, this will be their first time at a military establishment and there are rules to play by at the College. For instance, there are standards of dress and no mobile phones are allowed in the corridors, but the CFAVs who help facilitate the course are on hand to get everyone settled in.

Elen has no qualms in saying that she was petrified before coming to a working Royal Navy establishment, but the experience was brilliant and left her feeling fully prepared to command her section when back at school.

On day two the course kicks off properly. It’s back to basics with an HR brief, learning...
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