For as long as she can remember, Lt Laura Mullin wanted to be a submariner. The intense and unforgiving operating environment, the high levels of responsibility and the professionalism at the heart of everything that takes place on a submarine appealed to her.

"On board, everyone depends on everyone else. We all have the same purpose and share the same living conditions. There’s a lot of camaraderie, which I like,” she says.

Now 29, she has fulfilled her ambition as a logistics officer on HMS Vigilant and has already spent several months at sea. But just a few years ago this wouldn’t have been possible. Women were allowed to serve on submarines only in 2014. Of the Royal Navy’s 3,500 submariners, Laura is one of only eight qualified female officers, although more are currently going through the training.

She doesn’t see gender as a barrier to her chosen career. “I’m incredibly proud to be a submariner,” she says. “Nobody cares if you’re male or female because once you’ve got your dolphins, it’s irrelevant. The submarine qualification process is so intense that everyone recognises the hard work and respects you.”

In some respects, in the intense, enclosed world of a submarine, being a female officer can be a useful attribute for the crew. “On board, we have a divisional system: everybody has an officer who they can talk to about anything. I’ve got a division of about 15 people. As a woman, I do think the men come and talk to me maybe a bit more than they would do if I was a bloke.”

In our new series we explore innovations in equipment and practice in the three services and discover how cadets can learn more about them. Here, Connected talks to one of the Royal Navy’s first female submariners.
She says that everyone deals with life underwater in different ways. As well as the divisional system, there is a Diversity and Inclusion team on board that’s always available for crew to speak to, plus the boat’s doctor. “When I was at sea I took some photos to remind me of home. And loved ones wrote letters that I opened at certain points. My friends give me little care packages, with Lego and stuff to do inside them,” she says.

**CHANCE OF A LIFETIME**

But you get the impression that, for Laura, the time away from home and lack of personal space is a small price to pay for the opportunity of a lifetime. “The friendships that you make will probably last you for life. If you’re interested in engineering, it’s one of the biggest engineering challenges you’ll ever face and the nuclear technology you will work with is impressive.”

When asked what advice she has for young people – especially young women – thinking about a career as a submariner, she says: “Just go for it. It’s not a limitation any more, being female, and if you’re capable, medically fit and your eyesight is good enough and you pass all the tests, why not do it?”

She adds that applicants need to be aware that life at sea is completely cut off (no social media, no wi-fi, family contact limited to “Familygrams” of 120 words a week from a nominated loved one). Plus, “if you’re claustrophobic it’s probably not the best environment,” she says.

“But submarines are a constant learning environment. At any time, there is a submarine on patrol, maintaining the nation’s strategic deterrent. The qualification process requires you to learn so much, and there’s always the chance to improve your knowledge somewhere. It’s a completely unique experience that you will not get anywhere else.”

**“THE SUBMARINE QUALIFICATION PROCESS IS SO INTENSE THAT EVERYONE RECOGNISES THE HARD WORK AND RESPECTS YOU”**

*Lt Laura Mullin*

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**Life on a submarine**

**Deployment time:** more than 70 days

**Work-up package (submarine preparation):** 3-8 weeks

**Crew:** 168 (on HMS Vigilant) plus trainees, split into two watches

**Watches:**
- 07:00-13:00; 13:00-19:00; 19:00-01:00; 01:00-07:00 (crew rotate six hours on, six off)

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**Try This**

**TAKE YOUR CADETS TO VISIT A SUBMARINE**

1. **Experience a working sub**
   - Speak to Master at Arms Rob Grenfell (NAVYTRGCORE-CCFCLOP@mod.uk) at CCF RN HQ about the possibility of arranging a visit to a submarine for your Contingent. As well as meeting the men and women who work on the vessels, it may be possible for cadets to take a tour of a modern-day, working submarine.

2. **Experience a piece of history**
   - As well as the chance to experience what life is like on a modern-day submarine, cadets can also pay a visit to Britain’s only surviving World War II-era ocean-going submarine at Portsmouth’s Historic Dockyard (www.submarine-museum.co.uk).

At the museum, cadets can enjoy a guided tour of HMS Alliance from former submariners. There are also other activities on offer:

- A taught workshop from the museum’s Education Officers
- Time in the different museum galleries including the interactive Science & Submarines Gallery
- Time to look at other submarines such as Holland 1 (the Royal Navy’s first submarine) and X24 (the only surviving example of a World War II midget submarine).