



## **An exciting start to a career at sea**

Cadetship is a great way to start your career at sea and for Gard's latest sponsored cadet, Harriet Harding, it was even more so as she joined the Royal Research Ship Sir David Attenborough for the first sea phase of her cadetship.

Published 09 December 2024

Written by Neil Henderson

Since 2019, Gard has sponsored a cadet through the Maritime London Officer Cadet Scheme (MLOCS). The cadetship is a four-year programme, involving a combination of classroom learning and sea time onboard a variety of vessels.

The first Gard-sponsored cadet, Oliver Bailey, successfully completed his training earlier this year, and joined Shetland Islands Ferries as an officer two days after receiving his Certificate of Competency.

At the end of June, Tim Howse and Neil Henderson spoke to Gard's new cadet, Harriet Harding, to find out a bit more about her background, why she became a cadet, and how she is finding the cadetship so far.

***Unlike Tim, who started his cadetship aged 16, you started yours a little older. Can you tell us a bit about your previous career?***

*I only started sailing aged 20, for fun, when I was introduced to it by my partner who was a keen sailor. After he died, I threw myself into sailing and took my Yachtmaster offshore qualification. I sailed yachts, and worked in Knoydart, near the Isle of Skye in Scotland, driving boats for a winter. Then I joined a 1930s 50 metre classic motor yacht, working my way up from deckhand to bosun and cruising the Mediterranean for three years. My last job was back in Scotland, running a seven-boat team for an island regeneration project.*

*Cruising around the Mediterranean sounds like an idyllic life! What made you want to go back to studying?*

*I started to realise that a career in yachting would not take me as far as I wanted to go. Because of my certificate of competency, I was limited by the size of vessel I could skipper and any courses to further skills are self-funded. I wanted to develop a real depth of knowledge in seamanship and advance my career at sea. After meeting some cadets on a course at Warsash Maritime Academy, I found out that a cadetship offered what I was looking for, and it was fully funded!*

***Your first sea phase is on the Royal Research Ship (RRS) Sir David Attenborough. That sounds like a really interesting first ship to work on?***

*\*It is an amazing first ship to be on as there is just so much to learn about. It is 130 metres long and has a dual capacity as a mobile science laboratory and a logistics vessel for the British Antarctic Survey. There are some unusual features such as a moonpool for launching submersibles, and the ship is running on hydro-treated vegetable oil for the first time. I joined the ship in the Falklands, and we sailed back to Rosyth where we undertook a 20-day refit. We are going to be spending two months around the north of Scotland testing equipment, followed by her annual refit and then back down to the Falklands for November when I'll be signing off for a well-earned rest. \**

***And what is life like onboard; I'd imagine it's a bit different to your standard tanker or bulk carrier?***

*We are a crew of 45, with space for about a further 40 scientists. We are currently mainly British, with colleagues from Chile, Poland, Romania and Ukraine. At the moment I am one of only two women onboard, the other is my fellow cadet. But both the Chief Engineer and another engineer of the previous crew were female. The ship itself is really well-equipped for the crew: we have two gyms, a sauna, and the food is amazing.*

***What are your plans beyond November?***

*I get a couple of months off and then it's back to college at Warsash for another year studying. At the end of that I get to spend more time at sea. The cadetship is a four-year programme, so I've still got a way to go!*

*And lastly, from your time working in the Med, is the programme Below Deck Mediterranean (a reality TV show about charter superyachts) realistic?*

*No, not really. We partied far harder than they did!*