Introduction
Employment in the Forensic Science Sector has grown at an unprecedented rate over the last ten years, due largely to advances in technology such as the National DNA Database, and an increased reliance on forensic techniques by police forces for minor crimes. There are about 5000 staff working in the UK forensic science industry. The Forensic Science sector recruits about 200 graduates a year, but there are currently about 1500 forensic science graduates being produced each year by UK universities, so there is strong competition for jobs. (source: Forensic Science Degrees: The Higher Education Perspective).

What working as a forensic scientist involves
Though working as a forensic scientist will almost always consist of gathering and analysing evidence with the aim of helping to solve crimes or accidents, the work involved within the role can be quite varied, even within an individual case. Work could include:
- Recording findings and collecting trace evidence from scenes of a crime or accident.
- Analysing samples (such as hair, body fluids and drugs) in a laboratory.
- Applying various techniques as appropriate. Some of these could include DNA profiling, mass spectrometry and chromatography.
- Giving evidence in court, though this would only be done by an experienced forensic scientist, and as such wouldn’t be included in the role until several years after graduating.

Main areas of work
Chemistry
Generally, chemistry based forensic work will take place during investigations into crimes against property, such as burglary, and arson. This includes the analysis of contact traces such as glass, paint and chemicals, and also fire investigation, accident reconstruction and serial number restoration. However, the overwhelming work in this branch of forensic science would involve drug analyses, which make up approximately 80% of cases.

Biology
This mainly involves crimes against the person. Violent crimes such as murder, GBH and rape makes up most of the case types encountered, and the majority of examinations involve swabs of blood and other body fluids, hair and clothing fibres. Both traditional serological and DNA testing is used. DNA work is increasing because of the new nationwide DNA database, and crimes from many years ago are now being re-examined because of new DNA evidence.

Drugs and Toxicology
This involves testing for restricted drugs, examining tissue specimens, drink and drug driving samples, and the criminal and non-criminal investigation of deaths due to overdoses, poisons and drugs.

Skills and qualities required
- Great patience and concentration; much of the work of a forensic scientist is monotonous, detailed and routine, in contrast to the fast-paced, exciting nature portrayed in television programmes such as CSI and Waking the Dead.
- High quality analytical work.
- Excellent attention to detail.
- Giving that the work you undertake may be used as evidence in criminal cases at court, and will have to be presented by either you or a colleague, you must put aside any potential biases and emotion, and work in a logical, unbiased and methodical fashion, in order to produce impartial evidence.
- An inquisitive, open mind.
- Ability to work well in a team, and independently.

- Outgoing personality, with strong verbal communication and presenting skills an additional must if you want to take on a reporting role.
- Confidence; at the stage when as a reporting officer you are experienced enough to give evidence in court, you will be cross-examined by barristers. Therefore confidence in your findings is crucial.
- Equally, you need to be able to present complex scientific information in a clear, simple way that a member of a jury, with no scientific knowledge, can understand.
- Increasingly, applicants with business skills and commercial awareness, in addition to their technical capabilities, are being preferred.
- You will have to be prepared to work flexible hours – crimes happen at any time, so you may need to be prepared for evening and weekend call outs. Court work may also involve being on call at similarly unsocial hours.
- Finally, you will need a strong stomach! Some crime scenes can be gruesome and upsetting, as can the subsequent analysis that is so important.

Online resources
Prospects
www.prospects.ac.uk/forensic_scientist_job_description.htm
A job profile of a forensic scientist, with information about the
day-to-day work, entry requirements, salary information and
case studies.

Explore Forensics
http://www.exploreforensics.co.uk/TypesofForensicsCategor
y.html
Information on the different types of forensic science, with
individual pages for each of these. The links on the left hand
side of the page lead through to information that could be
useful for building up an up-to-date awareness of the sector.

Professional Associations
These are a great source of careers information and
commercial awareness. They often have a student membership
option, which allows you to attend events and network with
industry professionals. It also looks very good on your CV to
join one of these – demonstrating a real focus and commitment
to the industry.

The British Association in Forensic Science
www.bafm.org
The BAFM is the professional association for forensic
pathologists in the UK. It runs an undergraduate prize for
outstanding work done in electives or projects during
undergraduate study, details of which can be found on their
website.

Forensic Science Society
http://www.forensic-science-society.org.uk
An international forensic professional body, with members
from more than 60 countries. Their website hosts a useful
careers page, as well as links to other relevant society and
publications.

King’s CareerConnect
www.kcl.ac.uk/careerconnect
King’s CareerConnect is our exclusive online career portal
enabling students and recent alumni to engage with our
services. Once logged in, you can access our vacancy board
and search hundreds of part-time roles, placements, internships
and graduate-level opportunities, book one-to-one careers or
application guidance appointments, apply for exclusive King’s
Internships and view our full events calendar to book
attendance at our many events throughout the year.

Updated: November 2018

Throughoutour website there are links to websites whose
content is outside our control. The inclusion of links on these
pages in no way constitutes a recommendation of the services or
information provided. Please use your own judgement and be
especially wary of any service which asks you to pay! Be
cynical.

Our full policies on third party links and accessibility can be
found on the “About Us” section of our website.

This material can be provided in alternate formats. Please
discuss your requirements with a member of staff.

Photo by David Webster and shared under the Creative
Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 Internationallicense.

Copyright ©TheCareers Group, University of London