

Career -Related Questions	Answer
<p><b>What inspired me to go into forensics?</b></p>	<p>All I ever wanted to do was enter the world of Forensic Science. Even as a young child I was fascinated by the different methods that were used to solve crime. By the age of 11, I knew that a future in this field was for me. I started looking into different aspects of policing and evidence analysis, ensuring that sciences were key options at A-Level.</p> <p>During the final year of my Forensic Science degree, I specialised in Firearms and Ballistics: a study of firing mechanisms, the physics relating to trajectory of fire and the chemistry associated with propellants in ammunition. I was totally enthralled – I had discovered my true passion! Thoroughly loving the subject, I then began a PhD in Firearms Identification and Imaging, investigating firearm barrels, which generate unique markings on a bullet.</p>
<p><b>What A levels do you need to study forensic science?</b></p> <p><b>What do I need to study to become a forensic scientist?</b></p>	<p>When considering your post 16 qualifications (including A-Levels, BTEC etc.), every university and course has different entry requirements. UCAS enables you to search for the course of interest and helps you find which universities do that subject. For forensic science specifically this link will take you to the appropriate webpage for each university offering forensic science in the UK:  <a href="https://digital.ucas.com/search/results?SearchText=forensic%20science&amp;filters=Destination_Undergraduate">https://digital.ucas.com/search/results?SearchText=forensic%20science&amp;filters=Destination_Undergraduate</a>  In these pages it will detail the latest entry requirements.</p> <p>In general, for most forensic science courses you need to take at least one science (preferably chemistry), although some universities require two sciences. Mathematics would also be highly beneficial as statistics are commonly used to analyse data from experiments and research you conduct during the course.</p> <p>If you have not done traditional sciences then do not panic! There are alternative courses that do not require a science to gain entry as these courses focus on crime scene investigation and/or forensic investigation. Please see a more relevant UCAS search here for universities offering these degree options:  <a href="https://digital.ucas.com/search/results?SearchText=forensic%20investigation&amp;filters=Destination_Undergraduate">https://digital.ucas.com/search/results?SearchText=forensic%20investigation&amp;filters=Destination_Undergraduate</a></p> <p>If you are unsure, go to an Open Day to find out more or get in touch with the university you are interested in applying to and they will put you in touch with an Admissions Tutor and/or Course Leader who can help.</p>
<p><b>How do you go into forensics, academically speaking?</b></p>	<p>If you are considering a future in forensic science or crime scene investigation, you want to select a university course (Bachelor of Science; BSc) that is accredited by our industry's professional body, the Chartered Society of</p>

**Which universities specialise in forensic science?**

**What uni courses are good to do to become a forensic scientist?**

Forensic Science (<https://www.csofs.org/Accredited-course-search>) and go to a university with a teaching team that:

- Is highly dedicated
- Is approachable
- Is knowledgeable
- Delivers practical content
- Has expertise in the field you want to pursue in your career
- Ideally offers a placement/sandwich opportunity.

For example, at Staffordshire University (<http://www.staffs.ac.uk/courses/subjects/forensic-and-crime-sciences>) we have experts across all areas of Forensic Science. With a large, experienced team, we are also able to spend time working with outside agencies, researching and developing new methods and techniques. This not only gives students direct access to cutting-edge technology, but also provides important links to employers.

Studying Forensic Science or Forensic Investigation equips you with valuable transferrable skills and can provide a pathway into a wide range of other careers. These include roles in the police, various analytical environments and teaching. A Forensic Science degree is also a suitable stepping-stone towards a career in medicine.

**How did you get into forensic science in the first place?**

**What A levels did you do?**

**Where did you study?**

After completing my GCSEs, I studied the following subjects at Sixth Form:

- A-Level Chemistry
- A-Level Biology
- A-Level Mathematics
- AS-Level Geography
- AS-Level General Studies

I applied to a range of universities, specifically ones who offered a year out to work in industry after the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the course (called a sandwich or placement year). I worked very hard at school as I knew what I had to do to get in, and luckily this paid off – I was accepted by my first choice to study BSc (Hons) in Forensic Science with a Sandwich Year at Nottingham Trent University (NTU).

However, doing a sandwich course and completing an undergraduate degree did not mean I was guaranteed a job as a forensic scientist! Your part-time jobs, volunteering work and extra-curricular activities (no, not going to the cinema!) are also vital to being accepted by a university as well as getting a job in your preferred career.

	<p>It was towards the end of my placement year working as an analytical chemist that I decided that I no longer wanted to be a practitioner working full-time in the laboratory. When I developed the training package for the next placement student I realised how much I enjoyed developing others' skills, teaching and inspiring someone else to do the work and it was much more rewarding that just doing the lab work myself.</p> <p>In my final year of my BSc degree I undertook a research project, trying to determine a method to detect and analyse different enantiomers of amphetamine. During this year I was inspired to continue developing the practice, scientific methods and theory/knowledge that underpins what forensic scientists do to solve casework and I decided I wanted to become an academic. I love teaching the next generation of scientists and getting them involved with my research, which continually tries to improve what forensic science, policing and criminal investigation can do for society, to ensure justice is delivered, trying to prevent crime and future miscarriages of justice.</p> <p>For more information about my university experience, the route I have taken to get where I am today, the teaching I currently deliver at Staffordshire University and research I undertake with forensic scientists across the world, please see:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• My NTU experience - <a href="https://www.ntu.ac.uk/study-and-courses/courses/our-students-stories/science-technology/rachel-bolton-king">https://www.ntu.ac.uk/study-and-courses/courses/our-students-stories/science-technology/rachel-bolton-king</a></li> <li>• My staff profile page at Staffordshire University - <a href="http://www.staffs.ac.uk/staff/profiles/rb56.jsp">http://www.staffs.ac.uk/staff/profiles/rb56.jsp</a></li> <li>• Follow me on Twitter (@DrRachelBK) - <a href="https://twitter.com/drrachelbk?lang=en">https://twitter.com/drrachelbk?lang=en</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Is it fun/do you enjoy doing your job?</b></p>	<p>I absolutely love my job – I could not spend the 55 to 65 hours a week that I work doing a job I was not passionate about! The role of an academic is so varied and is usually different every day; I never stop learning something new and I could never get bored!</p> <p>I love working with my students, watching them grow, develop their skills and succeed in gaining employment and I equally love working with my police officers, forensic scientists, lawyers and academic colleagues aiming to change the future of criminal investigations and advance the practice of forensic science.</p>
<p><b>Least favourite thing about my job?</b></p>	<p>If I am being honest, marking laboratory reports for a practical that the class has done is my least favourite thing about my job as an academic. Mainly because it is very repetitive as there are typically between 50 and 160 students studying on each of the undergraduate modules I teach. I will spend 45 minutes providing detailed feedback on each piece of work and it is both infuriating and disappointing when all the advice, guidance and</p>

	<p>feedback I have provided has not been taken on board. On the other hand, I love marking dissertations and research thesis because every assessment I read is completely different and because the content is focused on research I learn new things every single time! In general, the more effort a student has put into their work, the higher the student's marks are and the more I enjoy this part of my job, so please do bear this in mind when you are completing your coursework for your teachers and future lecturers!</p>
<p><b>What advice would you give someone wanting to get into this job line?</b></p>	<p>The number of jobs in forensic and crime scene related fields have significantly increased over the last 10 years. When I completed my BSc in 2008 there were 2 jobs in the UK and both of these were senior level positions. Today, I find numerous relevant jobs every month that my undergraduate students are eligible to apply for and the range of jobs and organisations that are seeking employees are becoming more and more diverse. This is particularly so in the fields of digital forensics, which our Staffordshire University graduates gain successful employment in after completing a degree in Forensic Science or Forensic Investigation.</p> <p>A quick run-down for how to improve the chances of getting a job in this industry ...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Work/study hard, but it is important to sleep and have a life too!</li><li>2. Do a BSc (Bachelor of Science) degree, ideally with a placement year to gain experience while at university.</li><li>3. Do extra-curricular activities that are relevant, building practical skills and experience in talking to lots of different people (ages, backgrounds and experience levels). For example, volunteer with Victim Support, Missing Personal Charity, become a Police Cadet or Special Constable etc.</li><li>4. Make sure you can write well and have good attention to detail (spelling, grammar etc.) to ensure your CV/application forms/covering letters are readable.</li><li>5. Apply for a number of jobs even before you graduate - you may have to get a job outside forensic science/crime scene investigation first to improve your CV and evidence your skillset before you get your dream job.</li><li>6. Study the organisations you are applying to so you can confidently complete the application and answer interview questions.</li><li>7. Keep persevering – if you are motivated, determined and dedicated to get a job in this field you will!</li></ol> <p>There are many other pieces of advice I could give, but the list would be way too long and so you will just have to come to study with me at Staffordshire University to get all the info!</p>
<p><b>How do you get into a job in forensic science?</b></p>	
<p><b>How difficult is it to get a job in forensics?</b></p>	

<p><b>Do forensic scientists to the same thing every day?</b></p>	<p>In all honesty it can depend on the:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Field that you specialise in</li> <li>2. Size of the organisation</li> <li>3. Country you work in.</li> </ol> <p>I could not really generalise; some fields and job roles will be narrower and have more repetitive tasks than others. In my area, the field of firearms and ballistics is very broad and a forensic firearm examiner is likely to have a varied range of tasks that they do in their job meaning each day is quite likely to be different to the next. However, in the early stages of your career or as an IBIS technician for example, your role could be more focused, doing a small range of tasks every day. Even if the tasks are the same, the casework is always different though and can be quite unpredictable, which can make even the most menial tasks interesting and exciting!</p> <p>You can find out what you can do with a degree in forensic science here: <a href="https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree/forensic-science">https://www.prospects.ac.uk/careers-advice/what-can-i-do-with-my-degree/forensic-science</a> and read some relevant forensic job roles on this webpage to give you an idea of the tasks that different experts may do in their job: <a href="https://www.forensic-jobs.com/">https://www.forensic-jobs.com/</a>.</p>
<p><b>How long does it take to become a forensic scientist?</b></p>	<p>After you have completed your degree (or higher apprenticeship) you will typically need an additional 2 years of on-the-job training in a laboratory or crime scene unit before you are fully trained and competent to conduct casework on your own. However, again this may vary by forensic discipline, organisation and country where you are working.</p>
<p><b>How do you get work experience in the field?</b></p>	<p>There are a number of universities that have formal and informal partnerships with laboratories and police forces, which are sometimes the best mechanisms to support undertaking work experience through a voluntary summer or placement opportunity built into your university degree. The number of students that can be accommodated on forensic-related placements is small though and very competitive and you are not guaranteed that you will be successful in gaining such a placement. Therefore, you need to maximise your post-16 and university marks in modules right from the start. For example, 12 month sandwich placements (undertaken in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of university on a BSc course) are applied for in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year and therefore the only marks that employers have to go on are your 1<sup>st</sup> year undergraduate marks.</p> <p>However, any experience in a professional laboratory or organisation where you can put in to practice some of the key skills and competencies needed to work in your chosen field are invaluable as they are transferable. For example, experience in a pharmaceutical, histopathology, microbiology, food testing laboratory etc. etc. (even with your school's science technician) would be great experience.</p>

<p><b>Have you actually worked on a case?</b></p> <p><b>How many cases have you worked on?</b></p> <p><b>How many investigations would you help out with as a forensic scientist in a year?</b></p>	<p>Although I have not worked on live casework, I am actively involved with providing advice and experience on novel methods that are applied in casework occasionally. For example, undertaking x-ray imaging of heavily corroded firearms that have been buried or recovered from a lake to determine what firearm they are, whether they are loaded and whether there is need for further forensic testing.</p> <p>More generally, the number of cases a forensic practitioner will conduct will greatly vary depending on the forensic discipline and the country they are working in. For example, there are a relatively small number of firearm-related murders each year in a major UK city like London (less than 30 in 2018), Manchester or Birmingham compared to a city like Baltimore (nearly 300 in 2018) or Los Angeles in the USA. However, there may be a similar number of examiners therefore there are more cases to work on per week for USA examiners than those based in the UK.</p>
<p><b>Do you ever deal with incidents in the armed forces?</b></p>	<p>To date I have not been involved in such investigations myself as there are specific forensic science laboratories and crime scene units in some of the UK and international armed forces see <a href="https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/adjutant-generals-corps/provost/royal-military-police/specialistroles/">https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/adjutant-generals-corps/provost/royal-military-police/specialistroles/</a> for example. Additionally, private forensic providers may be asked to carry out independent investigations for the defence in the context of military incidents. I have informed some military personnel on firearm incidents though.</p>