

Forensic Scientist

Forensic scientists apply science to the law. They use various methods to identify and examine traces of physical evidence, and prepare them for use in court by the prosecution or the defence. They may establish a link between the accused and the scene of the crime or they may help settle disputes, for example find the cause of a fire. Although evidence is typically presented as a report, you may have to attend court to give evidence in person.

The Work

There are several specialist areas:

- **chemistry** – testing shoe prints, tyre or tool marks, flakes of paint, glass fragments, chemicals, including inflammable materials, often in cases of burglary, fire or counterfeiting
- **biology** – testing blood, other body fluids, DNA, hair or clothing in cases such as assault or murder
- **toxicology** – testing blood and urine samples for the presence of alcohol, drugs and solvents
- **firearms** – examining weapons or explosives, as well as discharge residues left behind
- **documents and handwriting** – analysing paper- or computer-based materials, in cases of fraud
- **fingerprints** – analysing, identifying and determining the quality of fingerprints.

You could be:

- visiting the scene of the crime to search for important materials
- doing scientific tests on items or substances, including DNA sequencing to establish identity or paternity
- using complex equipment and instruments such as liquid and gas chromatography and scanning electron microscopy
- making detailed notes of and interpreting test results
- recovering data from computers, mobile phones and other equipment
- writing reports on your investigations for the police, Procurator Fiscal and/or lawyers
- attending court to give statements on the results of your work.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of the company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Starting salaries for forensic scientists are around £25,000 a year. With experience this can rise to between £30,000 and £45,000 a year. Senior staff can earn up to around £60,000 a year.

Conditions

- You would work mainly in a laboratory.
- You might visit scenes of crime, indoors or outdoors – outdoor work may be in difficult conditions and all

weathers.

- The work may be distressing when attending crime scenes.
- You may have to defend evidence in court under cross-examination.
- You will normally work regular hours but sometimes be on call or work shifts.
- You will have to wear a lab coat and other protective clothing such as mask and gloves.
- You may have contact with dangerous or unpleasant substances.

Getting In

- Entry to this work is highly competitive.
- You will need a good Honours degree (SCQF Level 10) in a science subject such as forensic science, biology or chemistry.
- Entry requirements are usually 4-5 Highers including Chemistry and Maths or another science subject for forensic science or chemistry. For a degree in biology, universities may prefer Higher Chemistry and Biology.
- Some graduates in biology or chemistry take a postgraduate course in forensic science.
- The Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences (CSFS) accredits the BSc Hons Forensic and Analytical Science at Robert Gordon University, the MChem Forensic and Analytical Chemistry and the MSC Forensic Science courses offered by the University of Strathclyde, and the BSc Hons Forensic Sciences at Abertay University.
- It is not possible to get voluntary work placements with forensic labs due to the confidential nature of the work. However, work experience from other types of science labs would be beneficial.
- The CSFS launched the Pre-Employment Assessment of Competence (PEAC) in 2015, which is a one-day skills assessment designed to help graduates looking for employment in forensic science. It is optional, but employers may look on it favourably.
- Some qualified doctors become forensic medical examiners or forensic pathologists (see the [Medical Pathologist](#) job profile) and some dentists become forensic odontologists (doing forensic dentistry work).
- A driving licence is useful and may be essential.

Forensic science jobs are usually advertised in the New Scientist, as well as the local press. In Scotland, the [Scottish Police Authority \(SPA\) Forensic Services](#) combines forensic laboratory, scene examination and fingerprint facilities. It has a dedicated forensic multimedia unit, the first of its kind in Scotland. They advertise vacancies on their website.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- practical and logical
- patient and methodical
- very observant
- accurate and meticulous when carrying out tests and recording findings
- able to cope with distressing sights
- a confident communicator
- able to work under pressure and meet deadlines
- willing to take responsibility.

You should have:

- good written and verbal communication skills
- good concentration
- an enquiring mind
- an excellent eye for detail and the ability to undertake painstaking work
- the ability to work as part of a team, as well as alone
- the ability to meet tight deadlines.

Training

- Training varies depending on your employer, but is usually a programme of on the job training supervised by senior forensic scientists.
- You can do short courses in crime scene investigation, laboratory analyses as well as interpretation, evaluation and presentation of evidence, which are accredited by the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences.
- You must keep up to date with the latest developments and techniques in your field by undertaking Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Getting On

- You may have to start as a forensic science assistant, to gain practical experience before moving on to a forensic scientist job.
- With experience and ability, you could move on to becoming a reporting officer and other senior levels.
- You could become a specialist in one of the areas of work noted above – there is an increasing need for DNA analysts.
- You may be able to work as a private consultant.
- It helps if you are willing to move around the UK.
- With experience you could apply to be a member of the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences.

Contacts

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Royal Society of Chemistry Education

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Skills for Justice

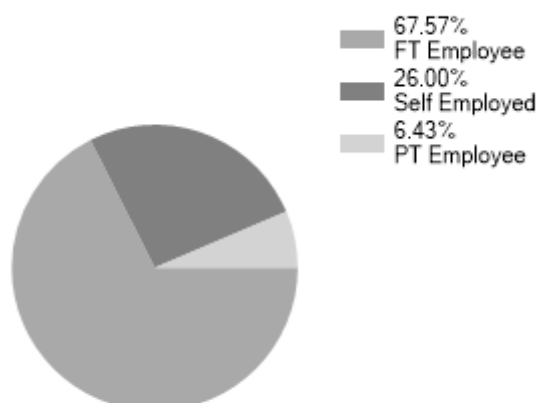
Tel: 0117 922 1155

Email: info@skillsforjustice.org.uk

Website: skillsforjustice.org.uk

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

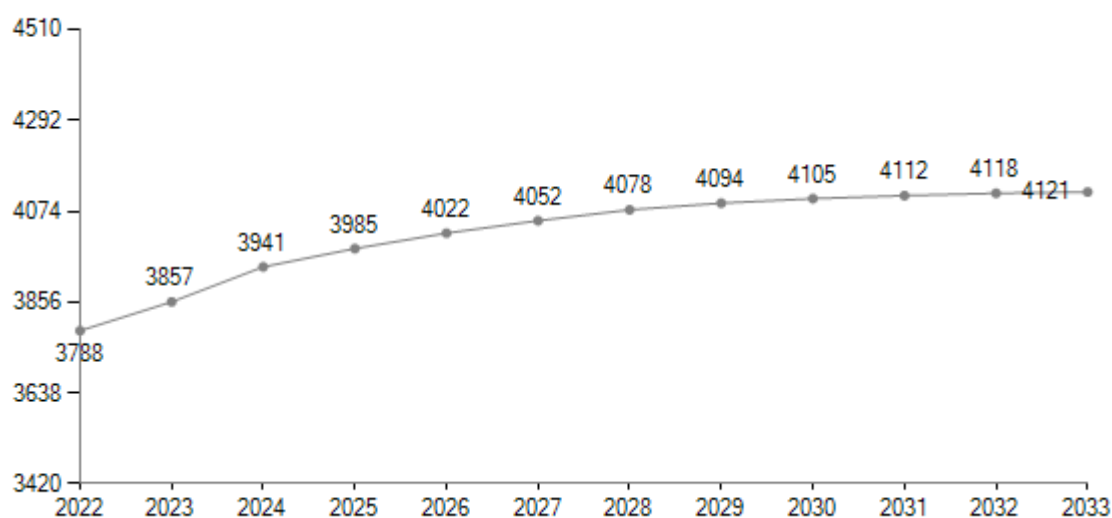


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [Lightcast](#)