

Blog 2 - A career in Crime Scene Investigation

As ex-Crime Scene Investigators, Dionne and I often get asked in our training and events...ooh. How did you get into that? What types of crime did you go to? Have you seen dead bodies?

As a result, we thought we would put this short blog together to talk about the role, qualifications and skills needed.

But...we entered the field after studying for a degree. We attended all types of crime, and yes, we have seen lots of dead bodies 😊

Career as a Crime Scene Investigator

The Role...

As a CSI, every day is different. The practices and procedures that you go through may be the same, but no two crime scenes, let alone days, are the same, and this is one of the great things about it.

Your primary task is to attend and examine crime scenes to find, recover, collect, and record lots of different types of evidence, things such as glass, hair, fibres, DNA, fingerprints, footwear marks etc. You attend all types of Crime Scenes including: Burglaries, Robberies, Murder, Kidnap etc and...

Key Responsibilities Include:

- Protecting the scene and preventing evidence from becoming contaminated.
- Making a thorough recording of the scene, taking notes, photographs and potentially videos, at the time of your examination.
- Recovering all evidence types in a logical and sequential process, making sure you package and label everything appropriately.
- Carry out fingerprint and footwear examinations using appropriate methods.
- Making sure that evidence is transported and stored securely and that its whereabouts can be accounted for at every step. This is known as the chain of custody or, continuity of evidence.
- Attend post-mortems, and photograph/recover samples.
- Record intelligence onto force computer systems.
- Provide assistance and advice to frontline Police officers and aid the investigation of crime.
- Complete written evidential reports and statements for court.
- Attend court to give evidence.
- Talk to home/property owners and victims of crime, to provide basic crime prevention advice. In the hope of reassuring them and preventing future crime.
- Work within Health and Safety guidelines at all scenes.
- Work within a set of competency guidelines set out by the force, known as ISO standards.

Skills and attributes needed...

You need to be a certain type of person to be a CSI, you see a lot of distressing things and some of the most horrible parts of humanity. The role is not suitable for everybody, but for those who can stomach it, it is extremely rewarding.

Your own personal skill set is also often way more important than academic skills and qualifications. Some of the top skills that make a good CSI are:

- Common sense – this is a must and believe it or not, it is not always that common. If you do not have common sense you will find CSI work extremely difficult.
- Communication skills are a must, of all types – reading, writing and verbal. You communicate with so many different people at all levels that it is essential.
- Able to work individually or as part of a team – this is so important, because as a CSI, you frequently work on your own but are also part of a much larger team, particularly when investigating serious crime.
- Ability to use your initiative and think outside the box – crime scenes often present unexpected challenges. You must be able to make decisions quickly.
- It is important to be organised yet flexible. - You need to be able to prioritise your own workload but as you are working through your duties, if something of higher priority comes in, you must be flexible and able to adapt/reorganise.
- You must be methodical, logical, and detailed, almost to the point of annoying – a lot of crime scene work is about sequential processing and recording information.
- You need a good sense of humour - a lot of frontline responders develop a dark sense of humour, which is often a coping mechanism for all the awful things you see.
- You need to be conscious of your own mental health. Be able to detach from work and not take it home, but also acknowledge and speak up when something is bothering you.
- Being inquisitive and analytical is essential – it is important to let the evidence guide you, not people. We live by the ABC rule...

Assume nothing, **B**elieve nothing, **C**hallenge everything.
- Despite the above, it is extremely important to be empathetic. Daily you deal with victims of crime who may be vulnerable or distressed. You need to be able get the information you need from them whilst also being sensitive to their needs.
- OBSERVATION skills! These are key, you will not get far without them, but essentially you are getting paid to be nosy!

If you tick most of these boxes, you have the makings of a great CSI!

Qualifications and experience...

This is tricky to answer as each Police Force sets its own entry requirements, and it changes frequently. There are also different entry levels, and again, this may impact the entry requirements.

In general, the minimum requirement will be 5 GCSE's including: Maths, English and Science.

Some Forces like you to have 'A' levels or equivalent, with a preference towards the Sciences. And some may require you to have a degree.

If you would like to be a CSI and enjoy studying, then progressing to University and getting a degree is a good thing and will stand you in good stead. If you choose this option, the best suggestion would be to find a University which has both academic and ex-practitioners teaching the course. In addition, make sure it is accredited by the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences. This means that the course has been independently assessed and has achieved required standards. Accredited courses can be found on the society's website at www.csofs.org

If you study 'A' levels – include a Science and Photography. As a CSI the camera is a really important tool that you utilise daily, to record crime scenes, so you need to be a good technical photographer.

If studying is not for you, do not be disheartened, there is still opportunity out there. As stated, a lot of Forces will accept GCSE's and are happy to carry out 'in-house' training and mentoring. Obviously, your aptitude and passion for the role will need to be contagious!

Hints and Tips...

- You will need to be at least 18 years old to apply.
- You must have a full driving licence.
- Having a scientific background will help. As a CSI, it is beneficial to know the Science behind what you are recovering and why, so that you understand what you are trying to achieve/the outcomes you hope for when recovering evidence.
- A photography qualification will help you significantly as you need to know your way around a camera and be technically competent.
- Volunteer in the sector to get experience. e.g., join police cadets, become a special constable or volunteer for victim support.
- There are many other interesting roles in the Forensics and Investigative world, other than CSI, keep an open mind to them all.

Thank you for reading: Angela Davies and Dionne Watson

A. Davies *D. Watson*

