



## **A Career as a Forensic DNA Analyst**

Our guest blog today is written by Natasha De Souza, who until recently was a Senior Forensic Scientist for Cellmark. Natasha spent 10 years specialising in DNA analysis and kindly shares her experience with us here.

### **The role**

As a Forensic DNA analyst, you are required to examine a wide range of items from Crime Scenes. These samples could contain bodily fluids such as blood, saliva, cellular (skin cells) & semen. Once the items are examined, it will be processed in a laboratory where the aim is to find out if that sample does in fact have DNA, and if it can then be compared to a sample on a relevant database.

### **Key Responsibilities / Day to Day**

No two days are the same and no two cases are the same either. However, the process of obtaining a DNA profile is standard. Samples are received from different police forces around the country. These samples are collected by either a Police Officer or a CSI. They are sealed in tamper evidence bags, and the type of evidence collected, will dictate which area of forensics it will go to.

Once the evidence is received, a DNA analyst will check the paperwork and the item to make sure it is correct. An examination of the item will take place. During the examination, the responsibility of the analyst is to work out where DNA could potentially be. Handling samples with care is imperative. Poor handling can destroy evidence or cause contamination.

After an examination is complete, the samples will be sent through to the labs where a different set of analysts will conduct the laboratory work. Their role is to take the sample that the examiner has collected and isolate the DNA using different chemicals and reagents.

Once this has been completed, a set of interpretation scientists will look at the DNA profiles and either load them to a database or ask for further lab work to be completed to improve the profile.

### **Skills and attributes**

As a Forensic DNA Analyst, you are required to work methodically and accurately. Taking your time and making sure you get it right the first time is the most important part of the job. Good attention to detail and asking questions is encouraged.

### **Qualifications and experience**

Private companies are willing to take on graduates and while they are looking for good candidates, they are also looking for people who are fit for team. This is really important as you have to work as a team throughout your day. I had a Forensic Science degree and graduated with a 2:2. I went on to be a Senior Forensic Scientist, so even if you don't have a 1<sup>st</sup> or a 2:1, do still apply. The role is not dependant on experience; however, a science degree is required, and if you have completed a Uni module where you can demonstrate lab practice, this is favourable.

### **Hints and Tips**

In your CV, have hobbies which are not Science based, this is the section which makes you stand out from other candidates because everyone who has gone to university, has pretty much done the same thing. So having a hobby or something which is different, makes you stand out.

### **Words of advice**

If it's your passion, don't give up!