

FINAL PLACEMENT REPORT

Research Assistant

Serious Crime Analysis Section

Serious Crime Analysis Section
NCPE Operations
Centrex
Bramshill
Hook
Hampshire
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Outline of the Placement organisation and my role in it

The Serious Crime Analysis Section (SCAS) is one of the operational divisions of the National Centre for Policing Excellence (NCPE). SCAS provides a specialist service to police forces in the UK by analysing crime under specific criteria – fundamentally rape, serious sexual assaults and motiveless or sexually motivated murder cases. Crime case files are received from intelligence departments in all UK police forces in the early stages of an investigation. Assistant analysts then code and input the data onto the ViCLAS (Violent Crime Linkage Analysis System) database before the analysts conduct analysis to identify possible similarities between cases. This can help identify cases committed by the same offender, possible suspect populations and lines of enquiry and investigative priorities based upon statistical procedures.

My role within SCAS is to assist SCAS staff, Behavioural Investigative Advisors and Geographic profilers in any research they require for operational support purposes, to carry out research being undertaken by SCAS as long or short terms projects and to keep abreast of the current issues in SCAS in order to gain full working knowledge of the core roles associated with this specific area of behavioural science.

Work and research

There are several tasks which have to be completed on a regular basis, which I take in turns with the other placement student in SCAS. These include writing SCOOP; a monthly newsletter aiming to improve communication within and across the offices. SCOOP contains information about office issues, news and events, and interesting casework that the assistant analysts/analysts/senior analysts have been working on. The research assistants are also responsible for maintaining the Journal Index in SCAS. This involves keeping up to date with newly published research each month which may be relevant to work in SCAS and making a copy available via the Journal Index. Similarly, the research assistants are expected to check the media on a weekly basis for updates on investigations and/or offenders and to report any interesting findings to the analyst involved in the case.

Since I have started, I have been involved in a variety of different work and research. As part of the induction period, I was given six research papers to read in order to gain knowledge and understanding of published research in the relevant area, with a view to participating in an informal discussion group. More recently, myself and the other research assistant have been heavily involved in a piece of research currently being conducted by SCAS. This research looks into the existence of databases in police forces which hold information on sex offenders, aiming to review the use and quality of the information held. We helped to design the survey, conducted all of the data collection, analysed the results on SPSS and produced a report of our findings. The findings will contribute to a sexual violence and action plan for the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) rape working group.

The research assistants are expected to carry out research undertaken by SCAS and the internal research programme for this academic year has been discussed with us. We were given an opportunity to express our preferences for the projects being undertaken this year and these will be allocated between myself and the other research student accordingly, where possible.

Additional Activities

SCAS use a variety of software to assist in their work. I have received training in how to use ViCLAS (in terms of searching the database) and Blue8world which is a geographic program used by all members of the SCAS team to aid their analyses. I have also been given two presentations; one on geographical profiling and one on behavioural profiling which improved my understanding of these areas of NCPE operations. Additionally, I have spent time shadowing both an assistant analyst and a crime analyst in order to see the process of a case from receiving the case papers and inputting the information to analysing the case and identifying possible links to other cases.

Other experiences I have had so far include attending and taking minutes for a Contact Officer meeting where Police officers from the East Regional forces discussed recent cases and reported on their correspondence with SCAS, and also a visit to one of the other Centrex sites in Wyboston. Additionally, I will be attending a DNA presentation next month and a conference and debate in London in November on crime research methods.

Supervision and availability of projects to use for dissertation

Both research assistants in SCAS share the same line manager who we see on a weekly basis. Although our line manager does not specialise in psychology, she oversees our work to make sure we are not over/under loaded. In addition to our line manager, I have my own research mentor who assists my work from a more specific psychology point of view. Therefore, the level of supervision is very good and there is always someone around to help.

In terms of dissertation projects, ViCLAS provides a wealth of information which can be used as data. However, the information held on the database is obviously at restricted level, therefore data would have to be sanitised before it can be taken for use with dissertations. In addition, the internal research program as previously mentioned can provide a good starting point in terms of having a detailed knowledge of the specific subject area and subsequently giving a strong advantage for the literature review.

Good and not so good points

One of the most useful things about working at SCAS is the flexitime system. This means that as long as you are in the office every day between 10am and 3.45pm and as long as you work 37 hours each week, you may start and finish at a time which suits (7-10am and 3.45-7pm). Most people (including me) favour earlier starts so that you can go home early.

The placement is paid, which is really useful, and I also receive 25 days paid holiday for the year.

There are not any bad points as such, however students wishing to apply for the placement should bear in mind the nature of the work - you will come across cases that you may find distressing. It is also extremely important to remember that you cannot talk to anybody outside work about any of the material that you have seen or read, which can be difficult especially with high profile cases.

Other Information

The Bramshill site is fairly remote, which means having a car is essential. I live in Wokingham and my journey usually takes 20-30 minutes depending on traffic.

Dissertation Possibilities

The dissertation will be based on forensic psychology, however due to the variety of information available here at SCAS, it is impossible to pinpoint an exact area of focus. A dissertation idea may arise out of the internal research programme being run this year, in which case, the literature reviews I am likely to be conducting are on the following subjects:

- Multiple offenders: Looking at rape/homicide offences where more than one offender is involved. Perhaps comparing this to the behaviour in offences where there is only one offender.
- Consistency in choice of victim: Looking at victims chosen in rape series' to determine whether or not offenders tend to offend against similar sorts of victim, perhaps in terms of age, sex etc.

Similarly, a dissertation idea can arise from reading journal articles and papers:

- As a result of reading research papers and journal articles, I have become interested in the sexual behaviour displayed in stranger rape; for example sexual deviancy and particularly the consistency of behaviour across a series. I am keen to continue reading in this area and subsequently may choose to write my dissertation on it.

It is more than likely that my dissertation will focus on rape, rather than homicide, due to there being more opportunity for analysis because of the variety of sexual behaviours.

Data is likely to be taken from the ViCLAS database but will have to be sanitised due to its nature.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that new management at SCAS have made it quite clear that there is to be no specific help from staff, as there has been previously, regarding dissertation ideas. It is very much up to the student themselves to find an area of interest and formulate their own ideas for a dissertation – there is no opportunity to work alongside another member of staff on a specific project and use this for dissertation.