Aliza Ahmed

BTEC Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Applied Sciences

SOLIHULL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY CENTRE



What made you choose a BTEC Higher National?

After completing my BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Applied Science, my original plan was to go straight to university. However, my grades meant I wasn't able to get onto the course I had hoped for, and my options were either to do a foundation year or choose a different route. My lecturers at Solihull College & University Centre recommended the BTEC Higher National because they explained that a foundation year would cover a lot of the same content I had already studied, whereas the HNC would allow me to progress to Level 4 and gain a higher education qualification.

At first, I was hesitant because I wasn't sure if I was ready for the step up to Level 4, but looking back, I'm so glad I took their advice. The HNC became the foundation that prepared me for university and showed me how much I genuinely enjoy science. I loved the modules because they combined theory with practical learning, challenged me academically and confirmed my passion for science.

I didn't apply through Clearing, but my plans did change from what I had originally expected. Looking back now, choosing the HNC was one of the best decisions I made because it gave me the confidence, knowledge and skills to progress to university.

> **"Looking back, choosing the HNC was one of the best decisions I made."**

How did your Level 3 BTEC help you progress to your HNC?

My Level 3 BTEC gave me the confidence and foundation I needed before starting the HNC. It helped me develop practical laboratory skills, strengthen my scientific knowledge and become more independent in my learning. Because of everything I had learned during my BTEC, I felt well prepared for the step up to Level 4.

Although the HNC was more advanced, I found the transition much easier than I expected because I was building on what I already knew rather than starting from scratch. That allowed me to really enjoy the course and make the most of the modules, especially the practical laboratory work. The HNC made me realise just how passionate I am about science and gave me the confidence to progress to university.

Why was this course the right fit for you?

The HNC was the right fit for me because it matched the way I learn best. I enjoy applying scientific knowledge through practical laboratory work, research and independent projects rather than just learning from textbooks. The modules were really interesting, especially Microbiological Techniques. One of my favourite pieces of work was creating my Unit 18 poster on the economic importance of bacteria and CRISPR gene editing. Through projects like this, I realised how much I love research and academia. I enjoyed exploring scientific literature, analysing evidence and learning about new developments in biotechnology. The HNC challenged me, built my confidence and confirmed that science was the right path for me. ►

Pearson

How has the HNC helped you move toward your career goals?

The HNC gave me the confidence and academic foundation to progress to Birmingham City University to study Operating Department Practice. It also helped me discover a real passion for research and biotechnology through the science modules and independent projects. As a result, it has broadened my career aspirations and given me the confidence to explore opportunities in both healthcare and biotechnology in the future.

Have you used what you've learned in real-life or work situations?

Yes. I use what I learned during the HNC every day at university. The anatomy and physiology module gave me a strong foundation for my current studies in Operating Department Practice, and the research skills I developed have helped me write assignments and evaluate scientific evidence. I also realised how much I enjoy researching topics in depth and using evidence to support my work, which is something I continue to do throughout my degree.

What would you say to someone who's unsure what to do next — maybe they didn't get into uni or are rethinking things?

I'd say, just take the first step and work it out from there. It's okay if your plans change because they often lead you somewhere even better. I never imagined I'd take the HNC route, but looking back, it was exactly what I needed. It helped me grow academically, discover what I really enjoy and gave me the confidence to progress to university.

What's been the best part of your HNC experience?

The best part of my HNC experience was how varied the course was. Every module felt different, so there was always something new to look forward to. I really enjoyed giving presentations because they helped me become more confident speaking in front of other people. I also loved creating my Unit 18 microbiology poster because it gave me the chance to be creative as well as scientific.

One thing that really surprised me was statistics. I've never been a fan of maths, but learning about things like standard deviation in a scientific context made so much more sense, and I enjoyed it. It's the variety of the course that I enjoyed most there was always something interesting to learn.

What are your future plans or career ambitions?

I'm currently studying BSc (Hons) Operating Department Practice at Birmingham City University. Once I've finished my degree, I want to stay in education and continue building on what I've learned through postgraduate study. I'm still figuring out exactly where I want my career to go because I have a lot of interests in science. During the HNC, I also spent a lot of time helping my classmates understand different topics, and that made me realise I actually enjoy teaching. It's something I'd definitely like to keep as an option for the future.

Progression pathway

Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Applied Science

Pearson BTEC Level 4 Higher National Certificate (HNC) in Applied Sciences

BSc (Hons) Operating Department Practice at Birmingham City University

V1.0 | October 2026