

Higher National Certificate in Counselling and Applied Psychology starting in 2025

Course Leader:	Lucia McAuliffe
Teaching Institution:	Herefordshire, Ludlow and North Shropshire College
Campus:	Hereford
Awarding Body:	Pearson
Final Award:	HNC
Intermediate Award(s):	N/A
Mode of Study:	Full-time
Qualification number:	610/1726/7
Date of programme specification preparation/revision:	23/06/25

Educational aims of the programme

Pearson BTEC Higher National Certificate in Counselling and Applied Psychology takes a student-centred approach to the curriculum. There is a flexible, unit-based structure that focuses on developing the practical, interpersonal and thinking skills the student will need to succeed in employment and higher education. They represent the latest in professional standards and provide opportunities for students to develop skills and behaviours for work, for example by taking part in a group project or meeting a client brief. A student may achieve exemption from professional or vendor qualifications, or membership of selected professional organisations to help students on their journey to professional recognition or membership.

The qualification aims to develop students with enquiring minds, who have the abilities and confidence. It offers an exciting and informative study programme that stimulates and challenges learners through a simple and flexible structure that enables them to take the Higher National Certificate and then build on it in the Higher National Diploma, with optional and specialist units linked to their area of study. It provides opportunity for students to follow specialist routes of interest at Level 5, gaining the knowledge and skills they need to progress to higher education or employment in their specialist area. Core competencies throughout the curriculum support continuing professional development (CPD) and learning skills for lifelong learning and professional development. It provides the opportunity for centres to offer assessments that consider cognitive skills (what students know) along with effective and applied skills (how they behave and what they can do) to support a practical and dynamic approach to learning. Unit-specific assessment and Pearson-set themes are designed to encourage thorough and analytical learning, challenge students and develop skills in critical thinking, personal responsibility and decision-making. There is a flexible approach to assessment that supports progression to higher education or work and allows for different learning styles. Quality Assurance measures that assure professional organisations, universities, businesses, colleges and students of the integrity and value of the qualifications, and a programme of learning designed to meet skills gaps in the current workforce and build today's talent to meet tomorrow's needs in an international environment

QAA and professional academic standards and quality

The Higher National Certificate in Counselling and Applied Psychology is located at level 4 of the Framework for Higher Qualifications (2014).

The following university and further education tutors, employers, Professional Body representatives and other individuals have generously shared their time and expertise to develop

these new Pearson BTEC Higher National qualifications in Counselling and Applied Psychology. Our thanks go to: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, Bromley Community Counselling Service, Learning & Wellbeing Psychology, Erin Stevens Counselling and Psychotherapy, University of Roehampton (Student Support Services), Therapyandhealer.com, Avenir Training Limited, Regent College London, Dunboyne College of Further Education, Barnet and Southgate College, The Manchester College, Stamford College, Sparsholt College, Newcastle City Learning, Halesowen College, Southampton Solent University, University of Central Lancashire, University of Wolverhampton, Nottingham Trent University, University of Roehampton, Lancaster University

National Occupational Standards

The Pearson BTEC Higher National Certificate and Diploma in Counselling and Applied Psychology aim to offer learners the opportunity to develop a range of skills and techniques, personal qualities and attributes to enable them to make an immediate contribution to employment and to provide flexibility, knowledge, skills and motivation as a basis for future studies and career progression in the sector. By successfully completing the Certificate and Diploma, learners should:

- Meet the training requirements for professional accreditation as a counsellor.
- Have met the Scope of Practice and Education (SCoPED) framework requirements for a column A therapist. This will facilitate progression to Level 6 study.
- Seamlessly transition from Level 5 to Level 6.
- Be equipped with the attitudes and behaviours required to succeed in counselling practice.
- Have the enhanced employability prospects and 'work readiness' of graduates.
- Have experience enhanced employer engagement.
- Be ready to take part in CPD and lifelong learning for personal and professional development.
- Have experienced a high-quality curriculum that translates theory into a strategic growth mindset.

Higher-level Skills

The Level 4 units lay the foundations of learning by providing a broad introduction to counselling and applied psychology and the users of these services. This develops core skills while preparing the student for specialist subjects at Level 5 or to enter employment with the qualities necessary for job roles that require some professional and personal responsibility.

Students will gain a wide range of knowledge linked to practical skills gained through research, independent study, directed study and workplace and clinic scenarios. Students are involved in vocational activities that help them to develop behaviours (the attitudes and approaches required for a competence) and transferable skills. Transferable skills are those that are highly valued in higher education and the workplace, for example, communication, teamwork, research and analysis. By the end of Level 4, students will have sound knowledge of the foundation concepts of counselling and psychology. They will be competent in a range of subject-specific skills as well as general skills and qualities relevant to key areas of these professions.

Course Structure

The Higher National Certificate in Counselling and Applied Psychology is a qualification with a minimum of 120 credits of which 4 credits are mandatory.

Unit Number		Unit Level	Unit Credit
Mandatory units			

Core Unit 1 Mandatory	Personal and Professional Development Through Inclusive Practice	4	15
Core Unit 2 Mandatory	Developing Empathic Communication for Effective Therapeutic Relationships	4	15
Core Unit 3 Mandatory	Preparing for Research (Pearson-set)	4	15
Core Unit 4 Mandatory	Ethical Frameworks in Counselling	4	15
Core Unit 5 Mandatory	Self-awareness and Reflective Practice in Counselling		15
Core Unit 6 Mandatory	Theoretical Perspectives in Counselling	4	15
Core Unit 7 Mandatory	Individual Differences	4	15
Core Unit 8 Mandatory	Digital Approaches in Caring Professions	4	15

Learning and Teaching Methods

Students will learn through a series of lectures, practical sessions, workshops, seminars and tutorials. They will also be required to undertake substantial independent study. Typically, this will involve completing online activities, reading journal articles and books, watching selected videos, working through example problems, working on individual and group projects, undertaking research in the library and online, preparing assignments and presentations.

Students will be taught by a teaching team whose expertise and knowledge are closely matched to the content of the modules on the course.

In a typical week, students will normally have 6 hours of contact teaching.

Means of Assessment

Students working at higher levels should be capable of undertaking independent study and research, developing strategies to improve their own performance, supported by teaching staff.

Students will be required to complete coursework as they progress through the programme and undertake assessments at the end of each semester. The assessment of Pearson Higher National qualifications is criterion-referenced and we are required to assess learners' evidence against published learning outcomes and assessment criteria. All units will be individually graded as 'pass', 'merit' or 'distinction'. To achieve a pass grade for the unit learners must meet the assessment criteria set out in the specifications. Merit and distinction grades are awarded for higher-level achievement.

All grades awarded are provisional until they are confirmed at the assessment board. This usually takes place at the end of an academic year.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is 'a method of assessment that considers whether an individual can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through

knowledge, understanding or skills that they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning'. If individuals can produce relevant evidence that fully meets learning outcome requirements then RPL can be given for their existing knowledge, understanding or skills

External Examiner

The External Examiner (EE) is a subject assessment specialist appointed by Pearson to conduct external examination. They verify that the management of programmes and assessment decisions meet national standards. External examination is usually conducted by an annual visit, usually in the summer term.

Additional Support

Developing effective study skills is an essential element in achieving academic success. All module leaders provide individual academic support. This is in addition to Personal Academic Tutor support.

All students are provided with a Course Handbook that comprehensively outlines the programme and provides advice and guidance. Module outlines and assessment details are provided for all modules. During your studies you will have access to fully equipped classrooms, practical workshops, Library with text and electronic resources and Student Services.

The College is committed to ensuring that disabled people, including those with specific learning difficulties and/or mental health difficulties are treated fairly. Reasonable adjustments to provision will be made to ensure that disabled students are not disadvantaged. The Learning Support Service is your initial point of contact.

Entry Requirements

Entry criteria detail a typical offer but the College considers all applications on an individual basis which means that we could make offers based on qualifications, personal profile and experience. If you have any queries regarding your offer, please contact our Admissions Team.

- a BTEC Level 3 qualification in a related subject, such as BTEC Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Skills
- a GCE Advanced Level profile that demonstrates strong performance in a relevant subject or adequate performance in more than one GCE subject. This profile is likely to be supported by GCSE grades at A* to C (or equivalent) and/or 9 to 4 (or equivalent) in subjects such as maths and English
- other related Level 3 qualifications in relevant subjects such as Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Advanced GCE in Psychology
- an Access to Higher Education Diploma from an approved further education institution in a relevant subject
- relevant work experience, or
- an international equivalent to the above qualifications. Our Recognition of Prior Learning policy means that students' previous learning and experience can be taken into account, and they may be awarded certain qualifications or units of a qualification based on that learning or experience. Please see Section 9 for more information.

To meet BACP approval requirements, Centres must have a selection process that ensures successful applicants have or have the potential to:

- develop self-awareness, maturity and stability
- reflect on life experience

- cope with the emotional demands of the qualification
- cope with the intellectual and academic requirements
- be aware of issues of difference and equality and
- recognise the need for personal and professional support.

The College welcomes applications from motivated applicants from all backgrounds. We recognise that student potential is not always demonstrated within formal academic qualifications and welcome applications from individuals from backgrounds that are under-represented within higher education.

Course Exit Points

To achieve the qualification a student must achieve at least 120 credits at or above the level of the qualification.

Progression Route

The Higher National Certificate in Counselling and Applied Psychology allows progression into or within employment in the Health and Social Care sector either directly on achievement of the award or following the completion of additional qualifications such as Adult Nursing BSc

The Pearson Higher National Certificate in Counselling and Applied Psychology qualification prepares learners for employment in the music industry and will be suitable for learners who have already decided that they wish to enter this area of work.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably be expected to achieve and demonstrate if s/he takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in associated course documentation e.g. course handbooks and module specifications.