

JENNIFER MA AND JENNIFER CHENG *Arch Academy*

CRUNCHING NUMBERS MAY HAVE BEEN THEIR initial calling in life, but when Jennifer Ma and Jennifer Cheng met while working at Goldman Sachs in Hong Kong, they discovered a shared concern for the educational progression of secondary school students.

"There were many internship candidates coming into Goldman who had the right credentials on paper, but lacked the vital skills for critical thinking and the creativity to solve problems," says Jennifer Cheng, who studied at Columbia University in the US. "We set up Arch in 2009 to bridge the education gap in developing such skills and in admissions preparation."

The academy, which offers courses all year round, helps students prepare for university – and beyond through debate groups, admissions, counselling, test preparation and writing workshops, encouraging them to develop a thirst for knowledge, not just for textbooks.

"We've grown from just 14 students to 500," says Jennifer Ma, who studied at Oxford. "We still maintain very tight focus groups of up to eight students and although our classes operate from 4pm to 8pm, we are open all day to allow our full-time teachers to engage in intensive training. And we've had some incredible success stories. Fifteen of our students this year were offered places at Cambridge and Oxford, covering 12 disciplines."

Arch's global network of higher-education contacts has allowed Ma and Cheng to offer students the best guidance for applying to top boarding schools and universities in the UK and US. The academy's flagship programme, Socrates, incorporates critical and lateral thinking methods and teaches students how to apply those skills to real-life situations such as current affairs.

It's not just about hitting the mark with offers from top universities, though. Ma says that Arch students learn important life skills through enrichment programmes. "We can't promise our students that they'll all get into the top university of their choice," she says. "But we hope to help students set goals, and to inspire a passion for learning and self-motivated discipline – hopefully for life." ■

