

Three years ago, Hamdi Ahmed, like thousands of other teenagers across the country, was patiently waiting to receive her A level results to discover if she had secured her university place.

But unlike many of her peers, Hamdi says that there was a very real possibility that she wouldn't be able to afford to go to university– in her case, University College London to study pharmacology.

She says: “At sixth form, I worked twenty hours a week outside school and my parents both did extra shifts to help fund my studies. It was a big strain on all of us.”

Hamdi, who has seven brothers and sisters, is now about to complete her degree. Even as a child, Hamdi remembers the weight her parents placed on education and its potential to change lives.

Hamdi says: “My parents really understand the impact an education can have. As I was growing up, both of them worked really hard and made incredible sacrifices to pay for extra classes for me, my brothers and sisters.”

In 2012, Hamdi became one of the first recipients of Ark's Reuben Scholarships – securing £10,000 per year to help fund her studies. Awarded to talented Ark students, the scholarship is designed to ensure that those from disadvantaged backgrounds can take up places at top universities.

Hamdi says: “The scholarship has been so helpful, I don't know what I would have done without it.

“The amount of work required at UCL has been massive and I wouldn't have gotten through my course if I'd had to combine it with a job.”

Hamdi's passion for pharmacology stemmed from her experiences when she briefly lived in Egypt. She says: “I have a real passion for the science behind drugs and how they affect everybody differently – medicine that might help one person might harm others.

In Egypt, a lot of people from poor backgrounds don't have the money for doctors, so go straight to the pharmacists and pay for the medication they think they need, rather than what they should be getting.



“A lot of people get given drugs that won’t help them – or will make things worse – which I think is really quite sad, but it’s also what made me interested in pharmacology and the importance of properly understanding pharmaceuticals.”

During her time at UCL, Hamdi experienced top-level scientific research first hand, completing her dissertation on the use of drugs to target the molecular defects that cause cystic fibrosis.

Now, three years after securing both the grades and the scholarship needed to complete her course, Hamdi is about to graduate and is looking to the future: “In the long-run, I want to become a clinical NHS scientist – but I want to give something back first, so I’m applying to train as a teacher. I’ve been volunteering and working as a tutor and really enjoy working with children.

“I’ve applied to train as a teacher in an Ark school through Ark Teacher Training. I would love to go back to Walworth Academy as a teacher.

“One of the best teachers I had at Walworth was Mrs Champion, my A Level biology teacher – she was such a genuinely caring person and you could tell that she taught because she enjoyed it and got a lot out of it. It’s people like her who have inspired me to become a teacher.

“From the day I started at Walworth Academy, Ark has helped me to achieve my goals – at school, at university and now, I hope, in my first steps into a new career.”

Hamdi says that the secret to academic success lies in hard work: “For me, the most important thing is to try really hard and put in a lot of effort – not just for yourself, but for others.”