

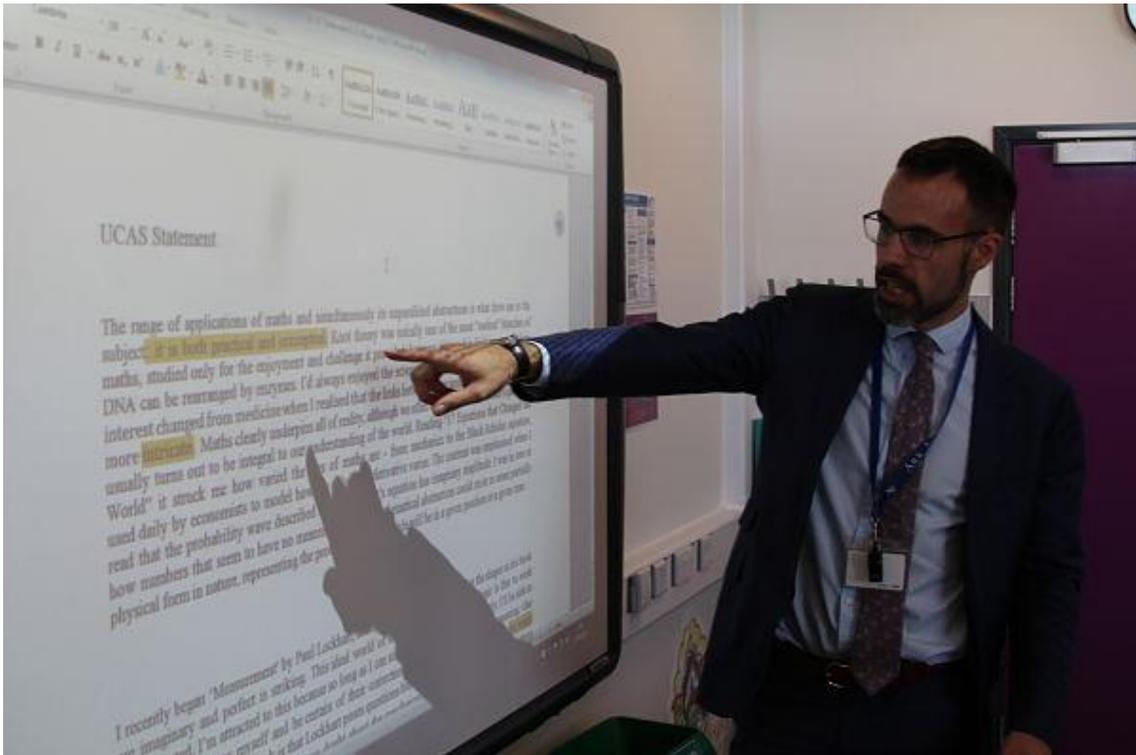
Ark Diploma – Mr. Sawbridge on Building Character of Sixth Formers

In the first of our new series of blogs from teachers across the Ark network, we hear from **Tom Sawbridge, Vice Principal at Ark Academy**. Here, Tom discusses building character amongst sixth formers using a tool of his own design, the Ark Diploma.

I'm Tom Sawbridge, Vice Principal at Ark Academy in Wembley, West London. When I joined in September 2015, I was put in charge of the personal development of our post-16 pupils.



This was the first year that Ark Academy had a sixth form cohort. There were 96 pupils. I hadn't led on personal development before and felt a little apprehensive. But I wanted to make a big, positive and sustainable impact which would help pupils prepare for a university and career of their choice.



So I came up with the Ark Diploma, an internal award designed to encourage and reward pupils who participated fully in meaningful, structured activities beyond the classroom. We set up extra-curricular societies and assignments for the students, including arranging for them to work as tutors to help primary students with their reading and maths. I impressed upon the students the importance of this award, and how it would help them build their personal statements.



We spent quite a while thinking about what activities would “count” towards the Ark Diploma. I think we got most of them right, although we have made tweaks for 2016-17. Pupils had to complete at least five Ark Diploma Goals, and those who showed leadership could be awarded a Gold Diploma.

Ark Gold Diploma (complete 5 out of 8)	Ark Diploma (complete 5 out of 8)
Completion of two terms' work of Outreach	Completion of one term's work of Outreach
EPQ	MPQ
Duke of Edinburgh (Silver)	Duke of Edinburgh (Bronze)
Leadership of school society	Active membership of school society
Participation in 5+ House Competitions	Participation in 3+ House Competitions
Regular performance for the school	Performance for the school
Leading charity fundraising	Participating in charity fundraising
Leading subject competitions or “off spec”	Involvement in subject competitions or “off spec”
Over 40 hours of work experience.	Over 20 hours of work experience
Completing 5 AS Levels (includes Ma / FM double or a heritage language AS,	



After completing each Diploma Goal, pupils completed a reflection on what they had learnt and had regular review meetings with their tutor (which were noted in the Ark Diploma Mentoring Booklet - you can download this below). They also presented their experiences to their peers.

64% of pupils completed the Ark Diploma and 12% were awarded the Gold Diploma for leadership. We were pleased with the completion rate and also with the quality. But I was most struck by the individual cases.



Take Balal above, for example, who came to my attention in September as an Ark Diploma sceptic, a bit disengaged from sixth form generally and someone with poor grades in his first assessments. He was persuaded to help children read in the Ark Academy primary school and he hasn't looked back. He said the reading made him feel "responsible, like the (primary) pupil was family" and helping had "built his confidence and work ethic". Balal has grown as a person, and developed the perseverance to succeed. It is no coincidence that his grades have also improved dramatically.



I'm pleased the Ark Diploma caught on in the way that it did. One of my other students, Dhruv (pictured above) ran an IPL All Stars enrichment activity for younger pupils at 7.30am every Wednesday – which took a lot of commitment.



Of course there were bumps in the road.

Halfway through the year, a lot of pupils thought the Diploma was only important because it was a qualification for their CV. I had to break it to them that it wasn't a nationally recognised qualification! In fact, I, and my tutor team, had not been clear enough – the Ark Diploma was important in itself, and for character development, not as a qualification. I learnt the hard way that clarity of vision and communication, in particular about purpose, is vital. Once pupils believe in a deeper purpose (not just CV building!), their intrinsic motivation kicks in and they learn in a more meaningful way.



This year we're offering the Ark Diploma to Year 12s, and to Year 7s and Year 10s in "junior versions". At Ark Academy, we have always had a strong ethic of civitas – helping others and doing the right thing – and the Ark Diploma builds on that. I'm looking forward to seeing it grow.