A born entrepreneur

Ting Zhao (MSc Urban Studies 2013) was born into a family of business brains. In the small town outside Shanghai where she grew up, her parents ran their own companies, so she saw the recipe for success first-hand. “I saw that you need to be a good problem-solver, flexible and efficient; and that it’s just as important to think about how you can be valuable to your community and society,” she says.

After her undergraduate degree at Nottingham, Ting decided she wanted to help Chinese students who were studying abroad select the right university course for them. Harnessing her entrepreneurial skills, she started to develop software for this but ran into difficulties. Just days before she was about to enter the UCL Bright Ideas Awards 2013, she used her business acumen to choose another path and came up with the idea that was to become Candarin Home.

Finding a niche

This business model has worked brilliantly so far, and Ting credits Lillian Shapiro, Student Business Advisor at UCL Advances, for all her help.

“Lillian has helped so much,” says Ting. “She has connected me to great marketing and web people, told me about free entrepreneurship courses provided for by UCL, and helped me get the Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneurship Visa, which was amazing.”

Ting has now moved out of the UCL Advances Hatchery space into her own office in central London. The Tier 1 Graduate Entrepreneurship Visa gives her the chance to build a business in the UK based on a clear market strategy, a scalable financial model and a positive social impact.

Firm foundations

Ting is an exceptional person,” says Lillian. “She is smart, charming, and very focused on providing an excellent service to customers. Her positive attitude has ensured she succeeds, finding solutions to problems, learning from them and moving up to a higher level.”

With her first employees starting this month and around a hundred clients on its list, Candarin Home looks set to soar.
About UCL
UCL (University College London) was established in 1826 and is ranked as one of the world’s top ten universities. The university is a modern, outward-looking institution, with more than 4,000 academic and research staff committed to engaging with the major issues of our times. It has a global reach, with 34% of its students coming from outside the UK, from almost 140 countries.

www.ucl.ac.uk

About UCL Advances
UCL Advances, UCL’s centre for entrepreneurship, helps anyone who wants to learn about, start or grow a business. Its primary role is to promote a culture of entrepreneurship on campus and engagement with entrepreneurs and small businesses beyond UCL’s boundaries. It works to support start-ups and small businesses across London by helping them to access the technical and business expertise of UCL’s staff and students through a series of programmes to help support ambitious young companies.

UCL Advances is affiliated with UCL Enterprise, which provides UCL’s structures for engaging with business for commercial and societal benefit.

www.ucl.ac.uk/advances
www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise

About Student Engagement
UCL does more to help students learn about, start or grow a business than any other UK university, giving them the critical skills to get a job or start their own venture. UCL Advances offers a whole programme of support – taking them through their entrepreneurial journey. This includes access to training, mentoring, one-to-one business advice from our in-house advisors, access to loans and grant funding, placements and the use of our Hatchery space.

A few of the activities are detailed below:

• The Student Business Advisers can provide students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and recent alumni with support to start, build and grow their businesses. Their advice is impartial, confidential and practical – they’re known for no nonsense, pragmatic guidance that fully takes their personal aspirations and goals into account.

• The UCL Bright Ideas Awards aim to help bridge the gap that many new companies find themselves in when they search for their first funding. The winners of these awards will share up to a total of £50,000 in funding that will be offered as a loan to help get their businesses up and running. Specifically, it is hoped that the money will allow the winners to reach the next crucial milestone in their development, whether that be the first prototype or support for landing the first customer.

• UCL is a sponsor for the Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) Visa initiative and has a total of 20 sponsored visas to offer to qualifying graduates each year. The Tier 1 (Graduate Entrepreneur) visa enables international graduates identified by UCL as having developed a viable business idea to extend their stay in the UK in order to start up their business.

www.ucl.ac.uk/advances/students

For more information see:
www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise