

A winning formula

By Narelle Coulter

The news earlier this month that he had secured a place at Melbourne University to study science came as sweet relief to Dandenong High School dux Abdul Basit Ahmad.

Abdul topped the class of 2020 with an ATAR of 97.15, placing him in the top 3 per cent in the state.

In March he will take a up a scholarship to study a Bachelor of Science and pursue his passion for physics.

"For me science is just the idea of understanding how things around you work. Unravelling what questions are there, the joy of solving problem," said the young scholar.

Abdul and his family arrived in Australia 2 and half years ago after leaving their home city of Quetta in Pakistan near the Afghani border. As Hazaras, the family was under threat of persecution and Abdul's parents were determined to secure a safer future for their four sons.

After being reunited with Abdul's father in Sydney, the family settled in Doveton and Abdul enrolled in year 10 at Dandenong High School.

He clearly remembers his first day at the school, which is one of the biggest and most culturally diverse in the south-east.

"It was a new experience for me and I had to get used to the diverse cultures. Everyone was very friendly and welcoming. I got used to the system pretty quickly, and the teachers were very good to me and helped me get through. I am very grateful to them," Abdul said.

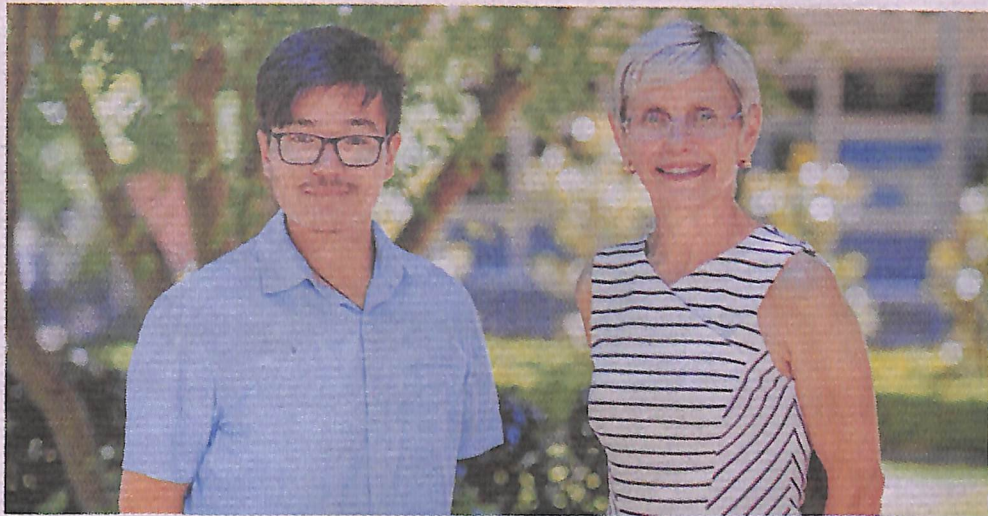
Abdul chose subjects similar to those he had studied in Pakistan. However, it was his English that required the most intense improvement.

"I wasn't very fluent in English and I had a bit of stammer, but as I made friends and got involved in classes and as I was speaking more often my language improved a lot."

For his VCE Abdul studied specialist maths, physics, chemistry, geography and English as a second language.

As if language and cultural barriers weren't enough, there was also Covid.

Students throughout Victoria had their education disrupted last year because of lockdowns and restrictions.



Dandenong High School dux Abdul Basit Ahmad and principal Susan Ogden. 226207

In July Dandenong High was closed to even senior students and those with an exemption for three weeks when a student tested positive.

The school provided Abdul with a laptop and he was lucky to have access to reliable internet.

Like most teenagers, he missed the face to face interaction with his peers, instead having to content himself with staying in touch via social media.

When he wasn't studying, Abdul spent lockdown chatting with friends, playing games and walking.

"2020 was a challenging year for everyone - students and staff. It was a different year and I managed to pull through which I am glad about," Abdul said.

Dandenong High School principal Susan Ogden said the Dandenong High School community was incredibly proud of the achievements of the class of 2020.

"Despite the significant challenges they all faced, including remote learning, a 3 week school closure where many of them could not access their resources and some VCE students testing positive for Covid-19, their results have been strong, with an improvement on previous years," Ms Ogden said.

"As a group they have demonstrated great courage and resilience."

Abdul said the secret to his VCE success was good time management.

"I managed my time well, invested my time in subjects I loved. I did nothing special but give it my best.

"I did what I love, pursued my passion and I hope to do that in the future too."

His outstanding score was celebrated by his extended family both in Melbourne and Pakistan.

His immediate family marked his achievement with a meal out at a local restaurant.

"The food was on me. I had to pay the bill," Abdul said, laughing.

He is grateful for the opportunities Australia has already afforded him and is determined to honour his parents' sacrifice.

"It is a good country. You get your rights, you can pursue any passion you want and, most importantly, there is no discrimination. You can do whatever you want, your actions are not based on how you look and where you are from."

And his advice to the class of 2021?

"Just do what you love. Follow your passion, have the best time and have fun. Life is not just about school, it's about doing what you love. Love it and you will get the results eventually."