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Gone:

**A study of the demise of technical high schools in New Zealand: including a case study
of the transition of Palmerston North Technical High School into Queen Elizabeth
College**

A research exercise presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirement for the Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History at
Massey University

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INTRODUCTION

This study assesses the impact of 'comprehensive education' in New Zealand in the short and long term, together with the increase of school leaving age to fifteen, on post-primary schools, and in particular, on Palmerston North Technical High School and its transition to Queen Elizabeth College.

The study will trace the development of technical high schools from their inception, together with changes in educational thinking and legislative action taken to implement those changes. The legislative action reflected the egalitarian view of education advanced by the first Labour government in New Zealand in 1935. Legislation was enacted to provide all young people with equal educational opportunities in the form of comprehensive education at all State post-primary schools. From its first expression through a Government committee in 1942, the egalitarian concept has remained the basis of educational policy in the ensuing years. From the 1942 Committee came a core curriculum for all Third and Fourth Form pupils. While the concept of comprehensive education through the core curriculum was enforced by legislation, it did not meet with universal approval and the study will note reasons for opposition. Government reviews since 1942 will be considered, together with any legislation which ensued from their recommendations.

Having summarised views and legislation, the study will assess their part in the eventual demise of technical high schools in New Zealand. It will be shown that, while all the legislation, except for one final action in 1965, was based on, and intended to support, the continuation of technical high schools as part of the post-primary education sector, each Act became a factor in those schools' demise. The implementation of comprehensive education began to eliminate distinctions between academic secondary schools and technical high schools. What the development of equal educational opportunity did not do was eliminate long-held prejudice in the community against technical schools, even in the developing format of comprehensive education. The community view of technical schools providing 'second-best' education was unfounded but it remained to dog the life of technical high schools and their successors. This prejudice would prove to be a major factor in their demise. The secular development of post-Second World War technology and its implication for post-primary education will be offered as a further major factor in the eventual demise of technical high schools, as vocational education moved from the post-primary to the tertiary education sector. With regard to this change, determined but eventually unsuccessful efforts

by technical high schools to meet the technology challenge will be discussed.

The study will consider primary documents such as Parliamentary Reports, Department of Education records, reports of Government appointed reviews, committees and commissions. *The New Zealand Education Gazette* which contained the official changes in post-primary education in 1945, and a paper by W.B. Sutch, Secretary for Industry and Commerce, recommending vocational training be moved from post-primary education to tertiary¹ also provide information for the study.

There have been a number of studies of technical schools in New Zealand. These include those conducted by overseas authors, F. H. Spencer,² and John Nicol.³ These studies, though dated, do confirm the intended place, at the time, of technical high schools in post-primary education. Later studies which have critically reviewed both New Zealand education in general and more specifically the way in which technical high schools disappeared, have been considered. Notes taken from several journal articles which relate to specific aspects of technical education will be quoted in the study, as will information obtained from histories of individual technical schools. At the end of the study two questions will be considered. The first, was the demise of technical high schools intentional? The second, was their demise inevitable?

The study will look at one particular technical high school, Palmerston North, as a specific example of the application of the idea of equal educational opportunity, both in the original technical school, in its development through Queen Elizabeth Technical College and finally Queen Elizabeth College. Newspaper articles, school year books and the history written for the 90th anniversary of the School and College have provided local material. Unfortunately a fire at the College destroyed School, College and Board records held there, but some files on the area held at Archives New Zealand did provide local information. The author's personal experience as a student at Palmerston North Technical High School, and personal records, will provide some details. Through these records and reports the way in which Palmerston North Technical High School fulfilled, at first, its vocational training role until the

¹ W.B. Sutch, *Education for Industry*, Wellington: Industries and Commerce, 1939.

² F.H. Spencer, *Technical Education in Australia and New Zealand*, Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1939.

³ John Nicol, *The Technical Schools of New Zealand: an historical survey*, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1940.

core curriculum was established will be assessed. As the requirement to become a post-primary institution providing comprehensive education became State policy, the School developed, and at the same time managed the increasing number of pupils remaining at school because of the increased school leaving age. The move to a new site to provide adequate accommodation introduced a new school title but continuing technical status until the technical term was legally removed from the national education scene. The study will then concentrate on the College's attempt to escape from previous community prejudice against technical schools while offering itself as a provider of comprehensive education as envisaged by legislation. Whether that attempt was successful or not, and possible reasons for the result, will flow from the analysis. The study will end by summarising the national and local scene with subsequent conclusions in response to the initial question regarding the demise of technical schools in New Zealand and a local example of that demise.

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