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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  
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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 tertiary<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> and John Nicol.<sup>3</sup> 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 90<sup>th</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.

## CHAPTER ONE: COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION AND INCREASING LEAVING AGE: THEIR EFFECT ON POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

This chapter begins by describing the post-primary school system prior to 1945, particularly noting the existence of three types of schools following the introduction of technical schools. It considers the attitudes towards technical schools of educationalists, parents, society and politicians. It then looks at the impact of educational and political changes in New Zealand, and concludes by examining how the emphasis shifted from technical education in the post-primary sector to technological education in the tertiary sector.

The establishment of 'day' technical high schools in New Zealand began early in the twentieth century. With their introduction, post-primary schools were divided into three categories – secondary schools with a largely academic curriculum, technical schools, and mainly rural district high schools. Technical schools were established in all cities and in some towns. Their original purpose was to provide an appropriate education for pupils who had not passed the Proficiency Examination at the end of their primary school year, and who were thought unlikely to attend university, or remain at a post-primary school more than one or two years. Such pupils, it was maintained, should receive practical training to fit them for their expected roles as artisans, farm labourers, or domestics.<sup>4</sup> Many parents did not accept such 'lesser roles' for their children which they believed technical schools led to, and some technical schools did provide 'academic' subjects, while some secondary schools, seeing an opportunity to gain more pupils and thus more revenue, provided some 'vocational' subjects. This duality raised some questions of efficiency in the sector, and Josiah Hanan, Minister of Education, 1915-1919 wondered whether such duplication was the best use of government funding for education.<sup>5</sup> By the 1920s and 1930s, many post-primary schools and parents were focusing on examinations – Public Service Entrance, and particularly University Entrance.<sup>6</sup>

The 1930s saw educational and political moves to change the shape of post-primary education. In 1933 Frank Milner, Rector of Waitaki Boys' High School, asserted in his

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<sup>4</sup> Roger Openshaw, Greg Lee, Howard Lee, *Challenging the Myths: Rethinking New Zealand's Educational History*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory Lee, Howard Lee, 'Comprehensive Post-Primary Schooling in New Zealand: 1935-1975' *History of Education Review*, Vol. 37, Issue 1, June 2008, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> David McKenzie, Gregory Lee, Howard Lee, *The Transformation of the New Zealand Technical High School*, Delta Research Monograph, University of Otago, p. 13.

presidential address to the New Zealand Secondary Schools' Association, that secondary school work was 'dominated unduly by external examinations', that 'traditional school values . . . [had been] pedantic and narrow', and that 'broader educational values were all too frequently absent from New Zealand secondary schools.'<sup>7</sup>

Ten years earlier, Labour M.P. Peter Fraser had said in Parliament,

I do not understand technical education – I do not think we have given enough attention to it – but there is no man in the Dominion whatever his occupation in life, but would be a better tradesman, a better worker, a better citizen, a better professional man, because of a full † cultural education. The Labour bench will fight for the opportunity of such education for † every child in the Dominion and there is no side-tracking scheme that we will agree to.<sup>8</sup>

When the first Labour government was elected in 1935, with Fraser as Minister of Education, it introduced a policy of 'equal educational opportunity', reaffirming his statement in Opposition that all New Zealand youth should receive a fully rounded education, none being deprived because of their status in the community, family occupation or economic circumstances. This would eventually be a factor, probably an unintentional one, in the demise of separate technical high schools in New Zealand.

In 1939, at the invitation of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, the British educationalist, Dr. John Nicol, visited the country and reported on technical schools. His visit had been preceded by the American scholar, Dr. F.H. Spencer, who had compared technical education in Australia and New Zealand. Such visits were an indication of interest in New Zealand technical schools, of which Spencer wrote '[In technical high schools] New Zealand has created a noteworthy and in New Zealand conditions a fitting type of school'.<sup>9</sup> In the Foreword to Nicol's report, Professor T.A. Hunter wrote

Technical education in New Zealand provides a striking example of the indirect or

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<sup>7</sup> Gregory Lee, Howard Lee, *Making Milner Matter: some comparisons between the Milner (1933-1936), Thomas (1944), and subsequent New Zealand secondary school curriculum reports and developments*, Palmerston North: Massey University, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (NZPD) 1923, Vol. 200, p. 530.

<sup>9</sup> Spencer, p. 93

round-<sup>†</sup>about method in social progress. If the secondary schools had not been so hide-bound, if they had welcomed Hogben's attempt to make their programmes more liberal and more realistic, New Zealand would possess not only a better system of secondary education but also a technical education of a more advanced character . . . The conservatism of the secondary schools was, however, responsible in large measure for the development of that almost unique type of institution, the New Zealand technical school.<sup>10</sup>

In his final chapter, 'Retrospect and Reflection', Nicol attacked a perceived tendency for technical schools to depart from their particular role and move into academic areas.

To provide a mode of entry into the learned professions is still a right, proper and most important function of a secondary school, but the function of the technical high school is equally laudable and important – to give to the non-academic pupil a pre-vocational training in keeping with his needs, these needs being widely interpreted. When the technical high schools forget this purpose and begin to disport themselves in purely academic fields, they are untrue to their principles. Everything that tends to diminish their concern or lessen their respect for the short course pupil is, in the present writer's opinion, harmful. They have an extensive and perfectly legitimate sphere of their own, furnishing scope for free development; why should they look longingly at fields which others possess and which have a greater semblance of attractiveness merely because they are artificially sheltered and have long cultivated with care.<sup>11</sup>

He praised the achievements of technical schools, but saw them having little or no role in the preparation of academic technologists.

Despite their imperfections, the technical schools of New Zealand as now constituted deserve respect; they have won the confidence of the public largely through the capacity, energy and vigour of their principals working untrammelled in a virgin field; but they are not training grounds for hosts of technological experts and it is

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<sup>10</sup> Nicol, p. Foreword

<sup>11</sup> Nicol, p. 235



futile to plan immediate development on the assumption that they are.<sup>12</sup>

To develop the process of 'equal educational opportunity' and the consequent concept of 'comprehensive education', the issue of subjects taught at post-primary schools came to the forefront. In 1942 H.G.R. Mason, (Minister of Education), appointed a committee chaired by William Thomas. Its Terms of Reference were:

To consider and report on the implications for the post-primary school curriculum of the proposed introduction of accreditation for entrance to Universities and in particular make recommendations regarding:

1. The choice of subjects for the School Certificate Examination;
2. The content of these subjects;
3. Any consequent modification of the Public Service Entrance Examination and the Free Place regulations.<sup>13</sup>

Before it began its deliberations, the Director of Education, C.E. Beeby, told the Committee that '[The] community cannot afford to have citizens who are lacking in a certain common core of knowledge and barren of certain experiences that seem essential to the intellectual participation in community.'<sup>14</sup> The work of the Committee was not aimed at technical schools in particular and examined all aspects of post-primary education. Issued twelve months later, its Report, began

We have set out to ensure, as far as possible, that all post-primary pupils, irrespective of their varying abilities and their varying occupational ambitions, receive a generous and balanced education. Such an education would aim, firstly, at the full development of the adolescent as a person, and, secondly, in preparing him for an active place in our New Zealand society as worker, neighbour, homemaker and citizen.<sup>15</sup>

To achieve this, the Committee recommended

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<sup>12</sup> Nicol, p. 243

<sup>13</sup> *The Post-Primary School Curriculum: report of the committee appointed by the Minister of Education in November, 1942*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1959, p. v

<sup>14</sup> Openshaw, et al, *Challenging the Myths*, p. 170

<sup>15</sup> *The Post-Primary School Curriculum* p. 5.

- (1) That up to the School Certificate the curriculum of all full-time pupils in post-primary schools include a core of studies and activities comprising English Language and Literature; Social Studies (preferably an integrated course of history and civics, geography, and some descriptive economics); General Science; Elementary Mathematics; Music; Crafts or one of the Fine Arts; and Physical Education. For girls, Home Crafts are regarded as satisfying the requirements of 'a craft'.
- (2) That optional subjects and activities from which a choice could be made to suit individual needs, be provided for according to the resources of each school.
- (Note - These would sometimes consist of additional work of a higher or more extensive kind in the core studies and activities themselves. . . .)<sup>16</sup>

New regulations and prescriptions applying to every post-primary school, enacted in 1945, followed the recommendations of the Committee. Mason claimed that 'The schools are at last free to adapt their courses and their methods to the varied needs of their pupils, and to give every child a broad, cultural education in the medium that he can understand.' He was at pains to point out that it was up to schools and teachers to ensure that the new system achieved the goals expected by the government and community

In so far as new powers and responsibilities have devolved upon the Department, I wish to make it clear that they will be used to give the schools increased freedom to develop along their own lines. . . . [T]he main task of finding answers to the many pedagogical questions arising from the changes will lie with the teachers. I want them to feel free to work out their own solutions.<sup>17</sup>

This emphasis was echoed by his Department

In themselves . . . new regulations and new prescriptions do little other than provide a framework within which the schools are required to work. The real spirit of the change must grow in the schools, and for its strength it will depend on the teachers. Are the schools prepared to make the most of the new opportunities offered them? Will the teachers accept the challenge to their adaptability and craftsmanship? Only

<sup>16</sup> *The Post-Primary School Curriculum* p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *The New Zealand Education Gazette*, Vol. XXIV, 1 November, 1945, Wellington, p. 280.

the future can tell . . . <sup>18</sup>

There was some opposition, both from 'academic' schools and technical schools, to the concept of equal educational opportunity and comprehensive education. Technical high school principals suspected that 'without their own separate sphere of work, technical would become swamped by academic bookishness'.<sup>19</sup> On the secondary school side, a representative of an 'academic' school in 1949 regretted that

Educational theorists . . . have unfortunately been given the opportunity to put their theories into practice. They lay strength on the natural growth of the child's mind and body . . . and forget that we no longer live in a state of innocence and that, in a sense, all education is unnatural . . . the so-called 'new education' is, in effect, less education.<sup>20</sup>

The following year, the editor of the same annual publication, wrote

[Boys' High Schools] gather together boys who desire to receive a good general education together with those who have the superior intellectual equipment that suits them for entrance to a profession. There is . . . widespread . . . a sentiment arising from a perversion of democracy which would like it to come about that because not everybody can benefit by such education, then no-one . . . shall have the opportunity . . . Whatever the merits of these comprehensive schools, they must demonstrably be less effective than the old type.<sup>21</sup>

Some Roman Catholic educationalists 'declared the [Thomas] Committee had sought to uphold the communist, socialist and "new education" doctrines'. They further claimed 'that the Committee had advocated "educational revolution" instead of "educational reform" . . . aimed at "revolutionary radicalism"'. There was also opposition from four university professors, one claiming that the report created 'the totalitarian school in the totalitarian state'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *New Zealand Education Gazette* p. 277.

<sup>19</sup> McKenzie et al, *The Transformation of the New Zealand Technical High School* p. 42.

<sup>20</sup> *The Palmerstonian*, Vol. 11 No. 3, November 1949, Palmerston North Boys' High School, p. editorial.

<sup>21</sup> *The Palmerstonian*, November, 1950, Palmerston North Boys' High, p. editorial.

<sup>22</sup> Lee, *Making Milner Matter*, p. 30 quoting Lee, G.D., *From Rhetoric to Reality: A history of the*

In line with the Thomas Committee recommendations, the core curriculum stipulated that in the first two years of secondary education, all post-primary schools would provide English Language and Literature, Social Studies, General Science, Elementary Mathematics, Music, Crafts or one of the Fine arts and Physical Education. Schools had the option of providing other subjects so long as the hours set for the core subjects were met.<sup>23</sup> An amended School Certificate examination was provided for Fifth Form pupils. 'To obtain the Certificate, pupils must sit at least four subjects, must obtain a total of at least 200 marks, with at least 50 in English.'<sup>24</sup> The examination provided an avenue for technical school pupils to gain a qualification, with thirteen 'technical' papers among the 32 subjects available. By staying at school a further year after obtaining School Certificate, students gained Endorsed School Certificate without any further examination. A new University Entrance examination could be awarded to pupils who sat papers or were accredited at the end of their Sixth Form year. Of the 20 subjects available for it, only three, Book-keeping, Mechanics, and Technical Drawing, were of a 'technical' nature. As it was unlikely that pupils studying Book-keeping also studied Mechanics and/or Technical Drawing, technical school pupils – while at least having another qualification opportunity – were still at a disadvantage, compared with their secondary school compatriots. Another disadvantage was the provision that pupils at 'academic' schools could be accredited the qualification, but technical school pupils were required to sit papers and obtain an aggregate of 200 marks in four subjects, not less than 35 in English, with no mark being under 30.<sup>25</sup>

In response to some criticism, particularly from secondary school teachers, that subjects such as Latin were being ignored or downgraded, in 1956 the National Government Minister of Education set up a group (known as the Wallis House Committee) to review the post-primary curriculum. The Committee reported that 'We are firmly of the opinion that the common core should continue.' After suggesting some changes to the operation of the common core, the Committee said, 'It should be emphasised that we do not wish to encourage narrow specialisation in the early years of post-primary schools.'<sup>26</sup>

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*development of the common core curriculum in New Zealand post-primary schools., 1900-1945,*

Unpublished doctrinal dissertation., Dunedin: University of Otago, 1991, p. 278.

<sup>23</sup> *New Zealand Education Gazette*, p. 280.

<sup>24</sup> Author's Examination result slip, 1949.

<sup>25</sup> Author's Examination result slip, 1950.

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*The Post-Primary School Curriculum*, p. 87.

In 1960, Phillip Skoglund, Labour Minister of Education, set up the Commission on Education in New Zealand 'to report on a wide range of matters'. Two years later the Commission (known as the Currie Commission after George Currie, chairman) reported to the new National Minister of Education, W. Blair Tennant. With regard to technical schools the Commission broached the subject of the future of technical high schools.

It has been submitted to the Commission that the technical high school has no further part to play in the education system of New Zealand and that its place can well be considered as taken by the multicourse school. Although it is plain that there are many parts of the country where a fully comprehensive type of school must of necessity be the only post-primary school in that area, the Commission is of the opinion that the technical high school still has an important function in certain circumstances and will have for some time yet.

The Commission sounded a somewhat uncertain note, seeing technical high schools 'as merely one variety of the † typical New Zealand secondary school, not different in kind but overlapping the ordinary multilateral school in the majority of its functions as far as the day school pupil is concerned'.

In the view of the Commission the future of technical high schools contained some uncertainty.

Whether in fact [technical high schools] become totally indistinguishable from the multilateral school depends not only on its own further development but on that of multilateral schools themselves. To some extent it must be dependent on the degree to which the latter adapt themselves better than they have so far been able to do so far in their work with the non-academic pupil. This is not to say that † there are not multilateral schools in New Zealand that have gone some distance towards solutions to that problem, but it is clear that the tendency to preoccupation with preparation with School Certificate and higher examinations has, particularly in a time of staff shortages, retarded progress in their schools towards satisfying the needs of a large section of their pupils for whom technical high schools have always specially catered.

Without specifically introducing the issue of 'class', the Commission suggested

It may be said in general that the technical high schools are better equipped to deal with this group of pupils than the average multi-course school or the more academic schools that are found in most of the cities and larger towns. Their advantage lies in their experience with and interest in pupils of this kind, their emphasis on particular work and studies related to and even directed at employment, and a subtle difference in attitude due partly perhaps to tradition and partly to the leavening influence of that portion of the staff who become teachers after a career in industry or commerce.<sup>27</sup>

Later the Commission maintained that the technical schools were now more comfortable with their position because 'the name, in any case is unlikely to die out, for schools cling to their old associations'. (As the future was to prove, this prediction was incorrect.) It continued with further comments on the future technical high schools, asserting that for technical schools there was now less desire to 'achieve "parity of esteem" by challenging academic schools on their own ground, and by establishing academic courses.' It based this claim on their understanding that

The engineering course at a technical high school leads ordinarily to University Entrance, and beyond. The terms "technical" and "technological" begin now to command a prestige of their own. To be a technical school pupil or to be a technical school in this scientific and technical age has no ring of inferiority.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, the Commission believed that there was clearly a role for 'these schools, whether called technical or not, . . . in their ability to provide for certain kinds of aptitudes that are in increasing demand in this scientific age'. They warned that, 'As long as they do not take a too narrow view of their functions but provide a liberal education in which the humanities are given due attention within a technical framework, they are turning out citizens who must play an increasingly important part in the life of the community.'

The Commission recorded that it was conscious of the demand for educational credentials in all post-primary education. It declared it had

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<sup>27</sup> *Report of the Commission on Education in New Zealand*, Wellington: Government Printer, 1962, p. 382.

<sup>28</sup> *Report of the Commission on Education*, p. 383.

been concerned very much, in its consideration of secondary examinations and certificates with groups of pupils who are found in considerable numbers in the technical high schools. They are the pupils who leave after two or three years at school to enter various employments such as offices, shops, trades, and factories, and who have at present no clearly defined educational objectives.

The Commission therefore recommended the creation of

[A] General Certificate of Education, which will allow a technical pupil to show excellence perhaps in one subject, and advocating the development of local certificates at the fourth form level, the Commission has had the needs of these pupils much in mind, and these changes should be of great benefit to these pupils in the future.<sup>29</sup>

In at section headed 'Senior Technical Education'<sup>30</sup> the Report picked up a factor which would strongly influence the future of technical schools. About this time the Government, industry and educationalists were considering how to respond to rapid new world-wide technological changes. / The Commission recommended

(3) That the separation of senior technical education from secondary education be pushed ahead as fast as the development of the metropolitan technical colleges permits, that a separate scale of salaries and separate conditions of service be established for such institutions, as recommended in the Interim Report of the Commission, and that payment in polytechnic branches of secondary schools to full-time and part-time instructors be reviewed in the light of these changes.

(6) That provision be made for the appointment of a deputy principal, to take charge of the polytechnic department, in large secondary schools where the polytech is approaching the dimensions of a separate technical institute.<sup>31</sup>

In a critique of the Currie Commission report, W.L. Renwick, a research officer with the

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<sup>29</sup> *Report of the Commission on Education*, p. 385.

<sup>30</sup> *Report of the Commission*, p. 385.

<sup>31</sup> *Report of the Commission*, p. 399.

Commission, highlighted the unanimous agreement within the Commission with two previous committees, that the New Zealand education system, including its post-primary sector, should operate on an egalitarian basis because 'that is the nature of New Zealand society'.<sup>32</sup> No doubt not all in New Zealand agreed with this proposition but I suggest the education system as such operated on the basis that it was true. Since the Thomas Report, both of the main political parties had supported comprehensive education and the common core curriculum for post-primary schools. As the move to establish 'comprehensive education' was based on egalitarianism, a philosophy which had given technical high schools an equal educational position with all other post-primary schools, the Commission's unqualified support of 'the egalitarian nature of education' clearly reinforced that position of technical schools.

Another Committee on Secondary Education reported to the National Minister of Education in 1976. By this time there were no technical schools but while its comments are on post-primary schools existing at that time, they reflect the way many schools had acted on comprehensive education.. The Committee found that, in general, schools had not used the freedom granted to them by legislation following the Thomas Committee.<sup>33</sup> It also wrote :

It is dangerous to plan for the future only by extrapolating from the past and present. Change in all aspects of life is the only certainty. The future will develop from both the past and present in a variety of predictable and unforeseen ways. It is fallacious to assume that secondary schools can remain constant in a changing world.<sup>34</sup>

In this essay's consideration of the development and demise of technical schools, with particular reference to Palmerston North Technical School, the relationship between 'predictability and unforeseen ways of future development' become clear. In 1945 not only was the core curriculum introduced but the school leaving age was increased from 14 to 15. In Chapter Two we will consider two ways in which an increased number of pupils affected technical schools, and in particular Palmerston North Technical School, through the need to 'occupy the minds of reluctant school attenders', and the increased number of pupils in Fifth

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<sup>32</sup> W.L. Renwick, 'Governing views of Public Education' in *The Currie Report: a critique*, Wellington: Association for the Study of Childhood Welfare, 1963 p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Towards Partnership: The Report of the Committee on Secondary Education*, Wellington: Department of Education, 1976 p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> *Towards Partnership*, p. 15.



and Sixth Forms seeking examination qualifications.

In making its recommendations, the Currie Commission was in tune with a paper that William Sutch, Secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce, had written in 1959, drawing attention to changes in vocational education which he considered necessary. 'The training of technicians should start when post-primary schooling is over. .... [T]hus education should not be interrupted by so-called vocational subjects.'<sup>35</sup>

The direction Sutch was proposing would, and did, move vocational training out of technical high schools and into what were to become, first Technical Institutes, later Polytechnics and eventually Institutes of Technology. This was not an attack on how technical schools had performed but argued that new educational methods were required to provide skilled persons to operate in the new milieu.

New Zealand industries and governments quickly took up this theme as they looked to increased productivity, the maintenance of the highest possible level of employment, and a share in the profits of new technologies. Such technologies were seen to require differently trained people, no longer requiring 'artisans' but 'technicians', with terminology moving from 'technical' to 'technology'. Presenting his Department of Education 1960 Report to Parliament, the Minister, P.O. Skoglund said

New Zealand has clearly reached a stage at which the economy and social progress of the country depends to a large degree on a vigorous and continuing development of technical education, and it has been one of my chief aims as Minister of Education to stimulate and facilitate development, . . . [I]n Australia I studied particularly those aspects of the training of Technicians that are specially related to our own developing path of higher technical education.<sup>36</sup>

Technical schools endeavoured to meet the new requirements by establishing 'Technical Institutes' within their structure and under the control of the School's Board of Governors. This was possibly not what Sutch had envisaged but was a pragmatic action by technical principals and boards to be part of the 'technology revolution'. A 1961 Amendment to the

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<sup>35</sup> Sutch, p. 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives A-JHR*, 1960, Vol. II, E1.2.

Education Act provided for the '[S]eparation of Boards of Management of technical schools into two separate Boards, one controlling the senior technical work, now defined as technological education, and the other controlling technical high schools.' A further Amendment in 1963 removed technical education from the post-primary framework, redefining it as 'pre-vocational education', and technical institutes were, for the first time, recognised as different from post-primary schools.<sup>37</sup>

The development of a suitable system for vocational training of technologists was a fluid one, with post-primary institutions such as technical high schools and tertiary institutions such as technical institutes, competing for a valid place in the system.

With regard to this new direction, Maxwell Reid writes

Although New Zealand has this long history of technical education in the intermediate and secondary schools, the delivery of general secondary school education has not always related the student to a realistic social framework of knowledge which is applicable to an increasingly technological world.<sup>38</sup>

Technology training was removed from technical high schools and became a distinctive part of the tertiary sector. Reid noted that in 1980 there were 17 technological institutes, in 1990 24, and in 1997 25.

One of the questions considered by this essay is whether the Thomas Report produced the expected, and desired, new direction. McKenzie<sup>39</sup> and Whitehead, both claim that, in retrospect, it was not unsurprising that technical high schools disappeared as technology moved into the tertiary education sector. Whitehead comments that teachers did not seem always willing to take their new freedom, but 'Even if they had been it is doubtful whether the social and economic pressures bearing on the schools would have allowed them to experiment with the curriculum . . . [L]egislation or instructions do not necessarily produce classroom changes.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> A-JHR, 1964 E.1.25.

<sup>38</sup> Maxwell Reid, 'Towards Effective Education in New Zealand', *Journal of Technological Education*, Vol. 11/2, Spring, 2000, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> McKenzie, et al, *The Transformation of the New Zealand Technical High School*, p.42.

<sup>40</sup> C. Whitehead, 'The Thomas Report – a study in educational Reform' *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 1 May 1974, p. 62.

Educational reforms have, and continue to be, an area of intense debate between stakeholders. As Roger Openshaw reflected on a 2010 debate, there 'complexity of political, economic and social reasons' regarding the type of knowledge necessary for educational development. In a newspaper article he offered examples of the ways politicians propose change and teachers question both the validity of, and the way they are required to implement such changes.<sup>41</sup>

Whitehead made the same point in his words quoted above.

In 1965, acknowledging reality, all post-primary schools became 'secondary schools'.

Every school (other than a private school) that was in existence immediately before the commencement of this Act (i.e. 15 October, 1965) and was then a secondary school, technical high school, technical school or combined school, shall be deemed to have been established as a secondary school.<sup>42</sup>

This chapter has outlined how philosophical, educational, social and legislative changes to New Zealand post-primary education from the 1930s, affected technical high schools. There is no evidence that the politicians wanted to remove technical schools and that the legislative changes were intended to abolish them. Rather, the philosophy of comprehensive education was intended to guarantee that all young people, no matter what their ability or vocational aspirations, and no matter which post-primary school they attended, would receive an equal educational opportunity. This was to happen by a common core curriculum for all post-primary schools, and again, there was no intention to eliminate technical schools. Certainly technological developments did move part of the purpose of technical schools from the post-primary to the tertiary sector, but even here it does not seem to have been expected that technical schools would disappear. But they did, within 15 years of the separation of 'technical' and 'technology'! To judge that their disappearance was inevitable requires the benefit of hindsight. In concentrating on Palmerston North Technical School the next chapters will trace the way in which the changes in legislation and social forces operated locally to transform that school, first into Queen Elizabeth Technical College and then into Queen Elizabeth College.

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<sup>41</sup> Roger Openshaw, *The Dominion Post*, Wellington, 25 August, 2010, p. B5.

<sup>42</sup> Clause 82, *Education Act 1964*

## CHAPTER TWO: *SCIENTIA EST POTENTIA*, PALMERSTON NORTH TECHNICAL SCHOOL TO 1955

This chapter reviews the development of Palmerston North Technical School from its inception in 1906 to its move to a new site under a new name in 1955. The effect of increased numbers of pupils, particularly following the higher legal leaving age in 1945, is assessed. It also considers the way in which the School was perceived by the community, both as a 'technical school' and as a co-educational institution. School achievements, educationally and culturally, are noted, as is the way in which the School sought to provide a rounded education for the children of 'working-class' families. Palmerston North Technical School provides a case study of how the political decision to ensure equal educational opportunities were available to all students through comprehensive education, impinged upon technical schools.

In 1902 the Palmerston North District High School Board began canvassing for pupils for a technical school, with the principal of the District High School in control. In 1906 a separate Palmerston North Technical School was established by the Wanganui Education Board. The following year authority was handed over to the Palmerston North High School Board, which remained the controlling body until the introduction of 'Tomorrow's Schools' late in the twentieth century. The High School Board was responsible for all post-primary schools in the Borough and later, the City. This form of governance was unique, as other technical schools in the country had their own Boards. In the first few years of the Technical School, pupils and teachers met in rented accommodation, but in 1909 the school centred on a site on the corner of Princess and King Streets, a site which has had continuous connection with the Technical School and its various descendants since. Workshops were later built opposite the main block, on the other Princes Street/King Street corner. In 1927 the Borough Council vested in the Board an area of land in Grey Street, approximately a kilometre from the main school, to be used as sports ground. In the mid-1940s prefabricated classrooms were placed on the main site to cope with increased numbers of students, and later, further prefabricated classrooms were erected on the Grey Street grounds. In 1949 planning was commenced for the School to move to a new site owned by the Board in Rangitikei Street. Although building was not complete, the School moved to the site in 1956, under the name of Queen Elizabeth Technical College, royal approval having been granted for the name.

The School increased numerically and developed academically. The first Director of the Technical School, Mr F.D. Opie, was appointed for only one year and if there were insufficient students the appointment was to be terminated. The roll did increase until, in 1949 there were 740 day pupils, 12 Sixth Formers, 200 Fifth Formers, 231 Fourth Formers and 297 Third Formers.<sup>43</sup> The previous year 13 pupils had passed School Certificate, and two had received Endorsed School Certificate.<sup>44</sup> The 1950 *Review* listed the Day School having a staff of 33 with 15 providing instruction in technical subjects, 21 students gaining School Certificate, 3 students receiving Endorsed School Certificate, and that one pupil passed University Entrance the previous year.<sup>45</sup> To the author's personal knowledge, four students passed University Entrance in 1950. The staff were organised in five Departments – Home Science; Commerce and Art; English, Social Studies, Physical Education; Industrial; Mathematics and Music.<sup>46</sup> The following year two new courses were available – Music leading to School Certificate and Accountancy for boys leading to School Certificate and University Entrance. In 1955 there was a staff of nearly 40 full-time and over 30 part-time teachers, over 800 day pupils and over 1,000 night school students. Earlier, in 1924 Book-keeping, and Shorthand/typing had been added to courses. Special day classes for unemployed youths were held in 1932 in such subjects as sheet-metal work, bee-keeping, woodwork and engineering workshop practise. In the same year two evening school students were the first from the School to complete the Accountants Professional examination. As with other technical schools, it appears that Palmerston North Technical School did not only concentrate on 'technical' subjects, for in 1933 one day school pupil passed, at his first attempt, the University Entrance and Engineering Preliminary examinations, and in 1935 there were 9 University Entrance passes. The School continued to grow in numbers. In 1937 the Principal reported that classes of 25, 28, 39, 28 and 26 were 'being packed into classrooms with a capacity of 20'.<sup>47</sup>

The effect of the increased official school leaving age in 1945 was at least three-fold. The number of pupils steadily increased. In particular the numbers remaining for Fifth and Sixth Form study grew, with more pupils gaining School Certificate, Endorsed School Certificate and University Entrance. For University Entrance it was necessary to gain passes in non-

<sup>43</sup> *Review 1949*, Palmerston North Technical School, p. 42-44.

<sup>44</sup> *Review 1949*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Review 1950*, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Palmerston North Technical School Parent-Teachers' Association *Bulletin*, No. 4, 7 November, 1950.

<sup>47</sup> *Palmerston North Technical School: 1906-1956: Golden Jubilee Souvenir Booklet*, p. 10- 14 and 32-36.

technical subjects, thus the School had to provide teaching in 'academic' subjects. Consequently there was an increase in staff numbers, But also, now there were students required, probably reluctantly, to remain longer at school. In his history of Wellington Technical College, Harrison comments, '[The increase meant some boys and girls attended] who were often from the lower ability group for whom attendance and formal courses were gloriously unsuitable, and they also included many classified as 'behavioural problems'. Therefore new, or altered courses were needed if schools were to cope with the challenge.'<sup>48</sup>

In particular, problems could be caused in workshop areas, which were 'dangerous and must have constant supervision from staff and attention from students'.<sup>49</sup> Clearly it was necessary for schools such as Palmerston North Technical School to provide either increased staff supervision, for which finance was not easily available, or alternative, 'safer' subjects to occupy the reluctant students until they were of an age to leave.

John Murray records that in 1906 a commercial class was established for those who did not take Latin and there was also an agricultural class. The Rector of the School at the time said, 'No one is forced to take Latin or French, though I think a good secondary education is not complete without the study of a least one foreign language.'<sup>50</sup> It is not clear whether these references are to the High School before the Technical School was established in the same year.

The 1939 Day School Prospectus of the Technical School advised that courses aimed to provide

[A] sound general education combined with a sound introduction to the principles and practice of some trade or occupation. [Parents are urged to] allow pupils to remain at school sufficiently long for them to gain advantages which the school offered . . . a period of three years at least . . . By early removal from the school the pupil loses[sic] all the opportunities for character-building provided in the classroom, on the sports field and through the various clubs and corporate activities of the

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<sup>48</sup> Noel Harrison, *The School That Riley Built*, Wellington Technical College, 1961, p. 113.

<sup>49</sup> Comment to the author by an Instructor who had worked in such areas..

<sup>50</sup> John Murray *Palmerston North High School: Historical survey 1902-1950*, Palmerston North: H.L. Young, 1952, p. 23 – note this book is a history of the Boys' and Girls' High Schools and contains no other references to Palmerston North Technical School.

Day School. All courses include English, History, Arithmetic or Practical mathematics, Drawing and Drill and girls [are] ~~not~~ required to take Home science for the first two years. On top of this foundation [are] laid ~~the~~ specialist subjects of the Commercial, Domestic, Art and Crafts, and Trade courses.<sup>51</sup>

The High School Board considered appointing parent representatives to some form of management committee for the Technical School, but the Department of Education advised that 'the power to elect [such representatives] is only when a technical school includes a technical high school'<sup>52</sup> No action was taken at the time but the matter of title arose again when the Technical School Principal wrote to the Department asking about 'the pros and cons of changing the name of the school from Technical School to Technical High School.'<sup>53</sup> The Director replied that there would be little or no advantage in such a change, either for pupils or staff.<sup>54</sup> However, later in the same year the Director wrote

The Department has discovered some "technical" problems with regard to the "Free Place / provisions" at [Timaru, Ashburton, Masterton and Palmerston North] technical schools, [which] should [now] be recognised as Technical High Schools [Would the] Palmerston North Technical School ask its Board if it would welcome the recognition.<sup>55</sup>

The Principal replied that 'the Board of Governors welcomes the proposal'.<sup>56</sup> Early the following year the Director advised that the Minister had recognised Palmerston North Technical School as Palmerston North Technical High School.<sup>57</sup> Both titles were used from then on, the 1950 *Review* being that of 'Palmerston North Technical School', while the end of year report (1950) for the author has the heading 'Palmerston North Technical High School'.

<sup>51</sup> *Queen Elizabeth College – Palmerston North Technical School: 90th Jubilee, 1996*, p. unnumbered.

<sup>52</sup> Department of Education to Palmerston North High School Board 6 April, 1921 ABEP 7749 W4262/2115 Record no. 35/2 Ministry of Education, Archives New Zealand .

<sup>53</sup> Principal, Palmerston North Technical School to Director of Education, 10 July, 1933 ABEP 7749 W4262/2115 Record no. 35/2 Ministry of Education, Archives New Zealand .

<sup>54</sup> Director of Education to Principal, Palmerston North Technical School, 22 July, 1933 ABEP 7749 W4262/2115 Record no. 35/2 Ministry of Education, Archives New Zealand .

<sup>55</sup> Director of Education to Principal, Palmerston North Technical School, 9 October, 1933 ABEP 7749 W4262/2115 Record no. 35/2 Ministry of Education, Archives New Zealand .

<sup>56</sup> Principal, Palmerston North Technical School to Director, of Education, 30 October, 1933 ABEP 7749 W4262/2115 Record no. 35/2 Ministry of Education, Archives New Zealand .

<sup>57</sup> Director of Education to Principal, Palmerston North Technical School, 30 January, 1934 ABEP 7749 W4262/2115 Record no. 35/2 Ministry of Education, Archives New Zealand .

Not only did the School prepare young men and women for a working life, it also provided cultural elements. In 1935, on the stage of the Palmerston North Opera House, Day pupils presented, for two nights, the operetta *The Mystic Mirror*; and a further night's presentation was required.<sup>58</sup> In 1950 the local newspaper reported

A wealth of juvenile talent, to say nothing of striking evidence of careful tuition and preparation, were revealed in the Palmerston North Technical High School presentation of Edward German's *Merrie England* at the Opera House recently. . . . [M]usic was provided by the Alex Lindsay Orchestra of Wellington.<sup>59</sup>

The 1949 *Review* records, seemingly with some pride, a list of ex-pupils who now operated their own business in the City. They included such fields as electrical trade, engineering, building, plumbing, jewellery, bicycles, leather goods, manufacturing soft drinks, and ice cream manufacture.<sup>60</sup> Ex-students known to the author of this essay are the authors, Yvonne du Fresne and Rona Adshead, C. Rennie, Mayor of Palmerston North, and Percy Griffin who was one of two students passing University Entrance in 1933, and who became a leading figure in the electricity distribution field in New Zealand.

The Editorial in the 1949 *Review* reads

In these days, when so many interesting forces are at work in the field of education – and especially that of technical education – it is interesting to record that our school has, during the last few years, made considerable progress and seems to be due, in the near future, for even greater, and more striking changes. However, while good buildings are important, they are by no means the greatest influence in school life. Good tone, healthy discipline, and the spirit of achievement are essential. With these qualities, we can truly say, our own school † is richly provided.<sup>61</sup>

As with other New Zealand technical schools, Palmerston North Technical School suffered from the unwarranted, but seemingly inescapable, opinion of the community that its purpose and reality was to provide 'second-best' education to working-class children. In a report on

<sup>58</sup> *Golden Jubilee Souvenir Booklet* p. 35.

<sup>59</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard* quoted in *Review*, 1950, Palmerston North Technical School p. 8

<sup>60</sup> *Review* 1949, p. 51

<sup>61</sup> *Review* 1949, p. 2.



The author, in a separate project not connected with this essay, sent a Questionnaire to some known to have attended a technical school. One question was 'Why did you attend technical school?' Among the responses were:

Father said that was where I had to go.

I was the youngest of a family of children and my parents had little money and my father thought it would be cheaper.. [Tech.] was definitely thought of by most people as a lower class of high school. Most of the derogatory remarks were noticeable when we met other schools in sports' tournaments or at bus stops or on the street. Some remarks were quite insulting and I was shy and found it hard to take rude remarks.

To become practical [because Tech.] was for lower-grade people.

High schools were for the brainy and better off.

My last primary school report read [T...] is a problem boy, [parents should] consider technical school.

To learn a trade.<sup>66</sup>

The author and his older siblings were sent to the technical school because our parents considered themselves 'working-class' and training for secure work was important following their experience during the Great Depression.

In discussing why educational choices are made, McKenzie writes

Parents and students also have a vested interest in what, for whatever reason, they regard as being the right kind of knowledge for them to support and study or practise. Typically, their choice will encompass factors such as traditional expectations, gender expectations, vocational preference, moral preference and cultural preference. Reformers who wish to change a curriculum need therefore to confront and interrogate these expectations and preferences. Conversely, agendas for reform which seek to establish change by pre-emption are likely to fail and to fail badly.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Recipients of the Questionnaire were not randomly selected and were persons known to the author. The responses recorded must therefore be read as potentially biased.

<sup>67</sup> David McKenzie, 'The Technical Curriculum : Second Class Knowledge' in McCulloch, Gary, (ed.) *The*

Harrison referred to teachers at 'academic' schools threatening misbehaving students with 'a fate worse than death - being expelled and sent to 'Tech.''.<sup>68</sup>

R.M. Algie, Minister of Education in the Holland National government, was convinced separate kinds of post-primary schools should continue, 'The status of technical high schools was less than satisfactory but if enough grass playing fields could be added to the environment of the urban technical high school, people would ~~be~~ be soon persuaded to consider them as institutions worthy of parity with neighbouring conventional high schools.'<sup>69</sup>

Algie's comment indicates that neither of the main political parties in New Zealand had a problem with technical schools as a valid part of the egalitarian nature of education demanded by New Zealand's egalitarian society. His contention is that all they needed to be equal with other post-primary schools was to have more grass! Although parents did not appear to always ~~be~~ making rational decisions in choosing educational directions for their children, surely it is extremely odd, if not really unthinkable, that more parents would send their children to a technical school so long as it had 'enough grass playing fields'? As a former pupil of Palmerston North Technical School I cannot remember envy among us of the 'green fields' of Girls' and Boys' High Schools. Instead, we enjoyed the use of Council parks and reserves for our sports, and the travel to and from those parks could be a time of youthful pleasure – something the pupils of the High Schools did not have as they went from classroom to adjacent fields. ~~/~~

Miss King, Principal of Otago Girls' High School, in 1926 claimed that 'As a rule those who go to the technical school belong to the labouring classes; those wanting a 'nicer' education go to the high school.'<sup>70</sup>

Toward the end of 1946 pupils in the top class at Palmerston North Intermediate were asked to say which post-primary school they would be attending the following year. The response was constant – Girls' High, Boys' High, - until one girl said, 'Tech.'. There was a gasp from

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*School Curriculum in New Zealand : History, Theory, Policy and Practice*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1992, p. 30.

<sup>68</sup> Harrison, p. 125.

<sup>69</sup> *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, (NZPD), 1950, vol 28 p. 4151.

<sup>70</sup> Quoted in *The Transformation of the New Zealand Technical High School*, p. 14.

most pupils and a disapproving look from the teacher. When a boy also said 'Tech.', the teacher responded, "Students from this class go to High School. They do not go to a technical school."<sup>71</sup>

That this attitude was widespread and continued long in memory is seen in Maurice Gee's novel, *Meg*, written in the late 1970s<sup>72</sup> but set in the 1920s. One character says

When I began taking the train from Loomis station on my way to the Girls' Grammar School, Fergus was in the 4<sup>th</sup> Form at Seddon Tech. He wore the green and yellow Seddon cap which I thought more attractive than the Mt. Albert Grammar one – though the Grammar boys were the ones I should be interested in. (Agnes has told me, but I did not need telling. They would be the doctors and lawyers, some of them, while the Seddon boys would only be butchers and bricklayers.)<sup>72</sup>

Again, as a pupil at Palmerston North Technical School, I have no memory of any envy, jealousy or feelings of inferiority towards Girls' and Boys' High School pupils, most of whom we had been class-mates with at primary schools and Intermediate. In the same vein, a respondent to the Questionnaire wrote 'after many years of teaching in a variety of schools PNTHS was right up there with the best of them. Good facilities, good equipment, excellent staff and fantastic students. [also] the opportunities we were given in pursuit of music.'

Another factor which gave some in the community a lesser opinion of Palmerston North Technical School was that, like other technical schools, it was co-educational. Despite New Zealanders generally priding themselves on being egalitarian, there does appear to be a tendency to consider as 'elite' and therefore of 'better' quality, single-sex schools. An editorial from *The Palmerstonian* stated '[Boys' High Schools] gather together boys who desire to receive a good education . . .', clearly placing the emphasis on 'boys together'. When the author of this essay asked a women friend why she had attended Palmerston North Girls' High School rather than the technical school, her reply was, 'Because there were boys there and I might have been at risk'. No matter what the perceived reason, co-educational schools did tend to be thought of as providing a less satisfactory education for teenage girls and youths than single-sex schools and there was little if anything the technical schools could do to alter that perception.

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<sup>71</sup> Personal experience of the author.

<sup>72</sup> Maurice Gee *Meg*, London: Faber, 1981 p. 102.

As roll numbers increased, the Palmerston North High Schools Board began to look at possible building developments. In 1940 it wrote to the Department, noting that 'in looking at the next 25 to 30 years, the current site may not be suitable', and suggesting the Department consider purchasing land in Rangitikei Street.<sup>73</sup> After considerable negotiation the land was acquired.<sup>74</sup>

Roll numbers at the school steadily increased

1 March,	1935	445
	1937	500
	1939	533
	1940	456 <sup>75</sup>
	1941	402
	1942	437
	1943	477
	1944	553
	1945	624 <sup>76</sup>
	1950	710 <sup>77</sup>

Palmerston North Technical School is a local example of how technical schools in New Zealand carried out their initial function of providing vocational education for young people who were considered unlikely to proceed to professional careers. The School, like other technical schools, began to offer a setting in which some pupils were able to gain examination passes, while ex-pupils showed the advantages of their technical education by becoming business and cultural leaders. Government action such as the move to require equal educational opportunities for all pupils, and an increase in the school leaving age, impacted upon the School, widening its course options and making it necessary to consider physical expansion, which, in 1955, led to a move to a new site under a new title. It has been shown

<sup>73</sup> Palmerston North High School Board to Director of Education, 9 February, 1940, Ministry of Education, ABEP 7749 W4262/2115, Record no. 35/2, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>74</sup> Proclamation of Departmental Ownership, *New Zealand Gazette*, No. 95, 27 November, 1941, p. 3752.

<sup>75</sup> Effect of opening Horowhenua College in Levin.

<sup>76</sup> School leaving age increased. Roll numbers are in Memorandum from Principal, Palmerston North Technical High School, 19 November, 1945 Ministry of Education, ABEP. Record no. 35/2, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>77</sup> Report from Assistant Director of Education, 24 May, 1950 ABEP. Record no. 35/2, Archives New Zealand

that the School, like other such technical facilities, suffered from unwarranted but widespread social prejudices. While political decisions led to some, if not all of the developments, they were encouraged, and even anticipated by the controlling Board actively pursuing best educational practices.

### CHAPTER THREE *SCIENTIA EST POTENTIA*, QUEEN ELIZABETH TECHNICAL COLLEGE, QUEEN ELIZABETH COLLEGE. FROM 1956 THE DESCENDANT OF PALMERSTON NORTH TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

This chapter considers the way in which the Technical High School's successor, Queen Elizabeth Technical College, built on the technical tradition. It notes the way in which legislative changes and procedures were applied at the Technical College. As the country, its government and industry, increasingly moved to a technological basis, vocational training shifted from the post-primary sector to the tertiary area. Queen Elizabeth Technical College consequently attempted to redirect its focus from a technical school to a multi-lateral, comprehensive one. The chapter assesses the way in which this was carried out and with what success. Demands by College leaders that the College be recognised and accepted by the community as having this new role will be noted, particularly as there were determined attempts to change the community's perception and distance the College from being labelled a 'technical' school. This attempt appears to have been unsuccessful and the College leaders lamented how their school, although increasing in numbers, was being lumbered with too many potentially low-achieving students, in contrast to other post-primary schools in the city. The leaders worked hard publicly to emphasise that the College was pursuing a more academic path. The new direction did not help improve the College's reputation in the community, and this problem was exacerbated by staffing and administrative difficulties. The chapter notes the steady roll decline and considers how educational changes and philosophical decisions brought the College to its current position. Attention will be given to signs of continuity between Palmerston North Technical High School and Queen Elizabeth College, despite the desire of the College for the community to forget its technical roots. College statements, newspaper articles, personal correspondence and Department of Education documents will be used to help arrive at a conclusion as to why and how the technical education history in Palmerston North faded from memory.<sup>78</sup>

Although all building work had not been completed, in 1956 Palmerston North Technical High School moved from its original site in Princess Street to Rangitikei Street, under the new name of Queen Elizabeth Technical College. Dr F.G. Spurdle, who had been appointed

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<sup>78</sup> In April, 2010, the Executive Officer, Queen Elizabeth College, informed the author that a fire at the College in the 1980s had destroyed most previous records. Some Department of Education records relating to the College and its predecessor are held at Archives New Zealand.

Director of the Technical High School in 1954, continued as Director of the College. Of the 42 College staff, 32 had been teachers at the Technical High School. Three who transferred had been at the School for more than 25 years - Miss C.W. Vautier (1928), Miss E.E.D. Smythe (1930) and Mr. N.A. Frye (1931).<sup>79</sup> The student roll increased and in 1957, as more students stayed at school longer to gain Endorsed School Certificate, a second Sixth Form was set up.

There was both continuity and change between the Technical High School and the Technical College. Before Dr Spurdle retired in 1965 he developed a new programme for the College, changing it (as from 1966) into a multi-lateral secondary school by widening the range of non-vocational subjects for both girls and boys. This development was marked by the College dropping 'Technical' from its title. Further changes occurred under the new Director, T.N. Worthington. While technical subjects were still taught, there was a new emphasis on academics, with the introduction of Professional and General courses. Where previously the ratio of boys to girls had been 2-1, in 1968 the ratio was equal. Fixed courses were abandoned in 1968 and new, free choice subjects, including foreign languages, began for Forms Three and Four. In addition to the compulsory subjects of English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Music, and Physical Education, some girls took Woodwork, and boys Shorthand-typing (this was not new as some boys – including the author – had taken this subject at the Technical High School). Maori language, art and culture, began as a subject in 1970.

Roll numbers continued to increase, there being 1,150 students in 1973, and, whereas there had been one student in the Seventh Form in 1966, there were 21 ten years later.<sup>80</sup> The increase in the roll at the College was not necessarily a sign that the school was moving towards an educational establishment providing equal educational opportunities for all young people. At the 1972 Prize-giving, the College Director complained

His commitment when he came to the the College was to work towards a separate technical institute, which was achieved in 1970, and to build a college of equal standing with the other three State secondary schools. The difficulties we have

<sup>79</sup> *Golden Jubilee Souvenir*, p. 29.

<sup>80</sup> Deirdre McGhie (research), *Queen Elizabeth College – Palmerston North Technical School: 90<sup>th</sup>. Jubilee, 1996*, Queen Elizabeth College, 1996, pages unnumbered.

encountered this year have been partly caused by the lack of suitable courses in the other schools. This has forced into this college what is becoming an impossible number of disadvantaged children.

He compared the College to other post-primary schools in the city.

The four State secondary schools should have courses for children of all abilities and failure to achieve this is a negation of our 'democratic and egalitarian principles held throughout New Zealand'. The successes of other schools so often lauded in the newspapers, are in effect, built on the deprivation to a certain extent, of students at Queen Elizabeth College.<sup>81</sup>

It appears that this problem remained for the College, as the Deputy Principal, F.W. Conway, continued that theme in a newspaper article in 1974. After commenting that multi-course schools were generally accepted by the public, with the idea that schools 'should reflect a true cross-section of society', he continued,

It is also unfortunate that the leadership of our secondary schools falls, almost invariably, to those who have themselves succeeded in the purely academic sphere. Because they have succeeded here they tend too often to see academic success as the ultimate goal for their pupils. When we consider that rather less than half of all the annual third form intake will make even the humble goal of school certificate, and less than ten percent will go on to university, the effort expended on things academic is disproportionate..

The Deputy Principal lamented the way in which the College was unfairly treated,

In this city, with four state secondary schools, one, with about a quarter of the town's secondary pupils, is frankly academic in its aims, and two are strongly inclined in the same direction . . . The result of all this is that the fourth school which erects no barriers to its intake, inherits the early leavers, the less able and more than its fair share of the troubled and the troublesome. Because of this, it is limited in its desire

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<sup>81</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 10 November, 1972, p. 1.



to operate fully as a multi-course school. It mounts classes in German, French, and Music to fulfil this function, but the staff involved are, frankly, uneconomically employed in comparison with many of their fellows who are over-employed with over large classes.

The Board of Governors and the general public was challenged to answer the following questions

Do we need even one school providing a purely academic education for one quarter of all our pupils? Are all the schools making equal provision for education in art, craft, music and technical work? Why do practically all Maori pupils attend the one school? Are they unwelcome elsewhere? By the type of courses they offer, and by the limitations placed on their courses, are some schools effectively selecting the most able pupils? Why can one school mount six third form language classes totalling about 200 pupils, while another, with equally able staff, can attract fewer than 20 language pupils? Why do three schools retain a rigid course system, while the fourth has had an open option system for some years? What are the educational or social benefits delivering from single-sex schools?<sup>82</sup>

Conway complained it was wrong that the College was still regarded as a technical school, which it had not been for the last eight years, and it was also wrong to assert that it lacked any academic courses, because all subjects, except Latin, which were taught in the other local schools were provided at Queen Elizabeth. Each year 32 subjects were offered.<sup>83</sup>

Evidence of the academic move by the College was claimed by Worthington in his retirement speech.

[T]he School C[ertificate] pass rate had once been 22 percent. It is now close to the New Zealand norm of 50 percent. And with University Entrance, we are above the norm for accrediting with about 60 percent accredited each year and we always have some pass UE by sitting. We have the best engineering and woodwork courses in the city, and up to 6<sup>th</sup>.form level as well as technical drawing, commercial, home

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<sup>82</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 19 July, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>83</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 19 July, 1974, p. 11.

economics, clothing and design for living courses.<sup>84</sup>

The comments of the Deputy Principal were followed in an article by the education reporter of the *Manawatu Evening Standard*, stressing that, while Queen Elizabeth College had not been a technical school since 1965, it did provide a wide range of subjects 'for future highly trained technicians'. The aim is not to provide vocational training, 'that is the task of the employer', but to 'teach basic skills needed for everyday living'. The reporter listed subjects offered in the technical department of the College – Technical drawing, Engineering theory, Engineering shop, Woodwork theory, Woodwork shopwork, Applied mechanics, Mechanics, Understanding the basic principles of the internal combustion engine – each at least to School Certificate, most to Sixth Form level.<sup>85</sup>

Problems at Queen Elizabeth College did not go away. At the start of the 1976 year the College, designed for a roll of 1,100, only had 980, 'while there were three over-populated schools'.<sup>86</sup> The Chairman of Queen Elizabeth College threatened the High School Board of Governors that the College would remove itself from the Board if it did not receive a more equitable distribution of pupils. 'We are supposed to get 290 Third Form students; we only received 126!' The Board heard that Third Form enrolments for the year to date were: Boys' High School 255, Awatapu College 239, Girls' High School 203, Freyberg High School 182, Queen Elizabeth College 126.

A former member of the College staff writes

At that stage [1978], many in the community still viewed QEC as a 'tech.' school and I think there has been a lasting impression that 'academic' pupils go to other schools – although when the school roll was large in the late 1970s and 1980s the school did draw from a fairly balanced section of the community. Since 1994 the school has had a reduced number of enrolments at Y[ear] 9.<sup>87</sup>

The duality between academic and technical for Queen Elizabeth College was highlighted again in 1984 when the Principal informed the Board of Governors

<sup>84</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 24 November, 1979 p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Annette McLaughlin, *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 2 August, 1974, p. 11.

<sup>86</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 20 February, 1976, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from ex-teacher Queen Elizabeth College to the author, (undated, received June, 2010.)

The city's enrolment scheme had already allocated [the College] 50 more boys than girls. Assuming those boys wanted to take the traditional male options of woodwork, metalwork and technical subjects, there would be a shortage of accommodation in those areas next year. To compound the problem, he had failed to attract one applicant for the vacancy of woodwork teacher.<sup>88</sup>

Although taking an optimistic view of the College, an Inspectors' Report also noted some problems. .

While still continuing to offer substantial assistance to handicapped and deprived pupils, [Queen Elizabeth ] College is now starting to function much more like a normal co-educational school. Fairer enrolment patterns plus emphasis on extending pupils, together with an industrious and happier staff, have resulted in the school being more highly regarded within the city.<sup>89</sup>

In 1979 the Inspectors' report continued to note some problems

The school attempts to cater for every child, and leans over backwards to help with learning difficulties. Students in the upper forms are not really being stretched. . . . There is a lack of real administrative skill at the senior level, which may now be rectified. With regard to problems and concerns, now that a new principal and deputy principal have been appointed, staffing problems may settle down.<sup>90</sup>

A few years later the Inspectors' report noted a roll of 908, which included a number of adult students and 26 in work experience.

Retention ratios are rising as a higher proportion of pupils stay on to higher forms. The College enjoys a growing reputation in the community. The school makes a determined effort to cater for the social and educational needs of those pupils who

<sup>88</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 18 October, 1984, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Memo in Department of Education file. The letter is undated and unsigned but from its place in the file between a letter dated 3 June, 1976 and the next dated 1979, it was probably written some time in 1977-1978 Ministry of Education, AAZY Record no. W3901/91, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>90</sup> Department of Education Inspectors' Report on Queen Elizabeth College, 1979, AAZY Record no. W3901/91, Archives New Zealand .

are less able academically. Two classes are provided in the Fifth Form for those who have found academic work difficult and do not wish to attempt School Certificate. Work is mainly based on the acquisition of skills both academically and socially and is proving to be of considerable value to those pupils involved. Since the Inspectors' visit in 1982, the quality of education provided has improved.<sup>91</sup>

The Report noted the following College departments:

Commercial – accounting, economics, economic studies, typing, shorthand; English; Home Economics; Maori; Mathematics; Modern Languages; Music; Physical Education; Science; Social Science; Technical – Technical subjects which have always been a feature of Queen Elizabeth College continue to attract pupils, 4 full classes in Form Three – subjects are Engineering and Technical Drawing, Woodwork/Metalwork.<sup>92</sup>

The movement toward technology education noted in Chapter One was put into effect at Queen Elizabeth College in 1971 with the development of Palmerston North Technical Institute. In line with what happened at other technical high schools such as Seddon Memorial College, Auckland,<sup>93</sup> Wellington Technical College<sup>94</sup> and King Edward Technical School, Dunedin, the Technical Institute was a branch of the College, responsible to the College Principal and Board of Governors. The Institute operated on the site of the former technical high school in Princess Street.<sup>95</sup> One report said that 15 teachers from the College had transferred to the Institute,<sup>96</sup> but a summary prepared for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the College said nine members of the staff transferred.<sup>97</sup> Whichever number is correct, clearly this made a major change in College structure. The same review noted that 'Over a period of several years the number of teachers involved in teaching the strictly technical subjects dropped from eight to four and there was a similar shift of emphasis from homecraft to more academic subjects.'<sup>98</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Department of Education Inspectors' Report, 1982, AAZY Record no. W3901/91, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>92</sup> Department of Education Inspectors' Report, 1982, AAZY Record no. W3901/91, Archives New Zealand.

<sup>93</sup> Louise Shaw, *Learning for Life: the origins of the Auckland University of Technology, 1895-2000*, Auckland University of Technology, 2002.

<sup>94</sup> Harrison p. 126.

<sup>95</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 8 August, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 30 September, 1970, p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> *Elizabethan*, 1981 Jubilee edition, Queen Elizabeth College, Palmerston North, p. 17.

<sup>98</sup> *Elizabethan* 1981, p. 14.

The Technical Institute later became Manawatu Polytechnic with a separate board of governors and is now the Universal College of Learning (UCOL). Through all these developments the original Princess Street site has been used by, first the College (the King Street/Princess Street workshops), the Institute, Polytechnic and UCOL.

From being a school with a roll of 1,150, with accommodation problems, in 2007 the number of pupils at Queen Elizabeth College was 305.<sup>99</sup> On the College website the 2009 Principal referred to the school as 'the best kept secret in Palmerston North', and 'Queen Elizabeth College is a small school which gives students many opportunities to succeed whether the success is in academic, sporting, technological or cultural areas'.<sup>100</sup>

Continuity from Palmerston North Technical High School through to Queen Elizabeth College is also seen as the College still uses the colours (red, yellow, navy), the logo, and the motto (*Scientia Est Potentia*) originally adopted by the technical school. However, 'for several years the word 'technical' had had a bad flavour'<sup>101</sup> so in 1965 it was deleted from the College name. At the College Centennial celebrations in 2006, there was little reference to the Technical High School ancestry. The sole reference in *Elizabethan 2006* was a time-line showing 'the evolution of Queen Elizabeth College'.<sup>102</sup> It required the author of this essay to lead reflections back to Palmerston North Technical High School in an address at the closing gathering. It appeared that the 50 years which had passed since the move from Princess Street to Rangitikei Street had virtually obliterated memory of the contribution of 'Tech.' to the educational life of Palmerston North and its citizens. This move from any remembrance of a technical high school is, probably not unique and is mirrored in the Index of a New Zealand Post-Primary Teachers' Association report. There is no reference at all to 'technical high schools' in the report. Instead the Index refers to 'Technology – influence on society'.<sup>103</sup>

When Palmerston North Technical High School moved to a new site with a new name, the clear intention appears to have been that the 'technical' nature of the school would continue.

<sup>99</sup> Queen Elizabeth College, Palmerston North. Retrieved 10 February, 2010, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen\\_Elizabeth\\_College\\_Palmerston\\_North](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_Elizabeth_College_Palmerston_North).

<sup>100</sup> Queen Elizabeth College, Palmerston North. Retrieved 10 February, 2010 from <http://www.qec.school.nz/principals.htm>.

<sup>101</sup> *Elizabethan 1981* p. 14.

<sup>102</sup> *Elizabethan 2006: celebrating 100 years: 1906-2006* p. 42.

<sup>103</sup> *Education in Change: Report of the Curriculum Review Group*, New Zealand Post-Primary Teachers' Association, Longman Paul, 1970.

Principal and staff, together with governance, colours, logo and motto, remained as before. The only changes were site and a partial name difference. The move planned years before for logistic and accommodation reasons coincided (probably unintentionally) with movements within the post-primary sector. A large increase in roll numbers, particularly in senior forms, required new courses, especially academic ones, as parents encouraged their sons and daughters to obtain higher qualifications. This meant the Technical College must continue to compete in the market place to obtain a reputation for highest quality education. That it failed to achieve its market expectations appears to have been largely because of the 'technical' tag which continued to be attached to it, both in title and community memory. There is a suggestion that there were possible racial implications in the community view.<sup>104</sup> For many in society, 'technical', in cultural perception, continued to be viewed as 'second-best' and attached to the 'lower-class', low-achievers and the 'troubled and troublesome'. As more and more parents looked to other high schools in the city for their daughters' and sons' education and preparation for the 'best employment', and as the other high schools encouraged them to do so by imposing academic restrictions on entry, the College was left with more and more students who found education difficult. Because of this the College's reputation in the community descended, and the downward spiral intensified, something which was not overcome by leadership and staffing difficulties.

Despite strong and persistent efforts by College leaders to show otherwise, it appears the reputation was irreversibly damaged. That the College was co-educational, with certain community assumptions about that form of schooling, did not help, but the fact that two of the other post-primary schools in the city were co-educational without being considered 'too' inferior, suggests the historic 'technical' label was the major factor producing the societal view of inferior education. Concepts in the wider educational sphere were to impact upon the College as vocational training moved from 'technical' in the post-primary sector to 'technology' in the tertiary sector. The College met this challenge in the same way other technical high schools did, by establishing a Technical Institute within its ranks, which further evolved to become a separate establishment as Manawatu Polytechnic. The name 'technical' disappeared from the College title but its history remained as an albatross around its neck. In the early years of the College life, legislative action appeared to be on the assumption that technical high schools, (or colleges) as such would continue. Within ten years of the College establishment, that assumption had disappeared and the State and educational view was that

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<sup>104</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 24 November, 1979, p. 4.

A co-incidental but unintended threat to the future of technical high schools was raising the leaving age to 15. Reluctant pupils needed courses which removed them from danger in a workshop environment, and an increasing number of pupils remained for education in higher Forms. While still distinct, secondary schools and technical high schools began to appear more similar. For the next two decades each governmental review of post-primary education reiterated the concept of New Zealand being an egalitarian society providing an egalitarian educational system. The place of technical high schools was continually affirmed as being a valuable tool in the development of the community and the achieving of its aspirations. But the decisions made by each review group, and subsequent parliamentary legislation, further decreased the distinction between technical high schools and academic secondary schools. To the question of whether the demise of technical high schools was intentional, the answer is no, at least not until all post-primary schools were classified as secondary schools in 1965. To the further question of whether the demise of technical high schools was inevitable, the answer is yes, a result of the operation of the Law of Unforeseen Consequences. The decisions of each review and the legislation of their recommendations, followed by implementation of the legislation by post-primary schools, brought academic secondary schools and technical high schools to a point where there was no formal curriculum difference. There did remain in the minds of many in the community a prejudice against former technical high schools. Some former academic schools also restricted enrolment to pupils considered to be high achievers. This policy reinforced prejudice against ex-technical high schools, which were considered to have a larger group of less academic pupils. When vocational education was changed from 'technical' to 'technology' and became part of the tertiary sector, the reason for separate technical high schools no longer existed. The demise of technical high schools from the New Zealand educational scene after close to 70 years of high quality activity was now a reality.

The way in which technical education nationally was affected by legislation, market pressure and community opinion, is mirrored in the development and demise of technical education in Palmerston North. From its establishment, Palmerston North Technical School provided vocational education mainly to pupils who had not passed the Proficiency examination at a primary school. Such pupils completed their compulsory schooling and left as early as possible to obtain a job. With few exceptions until the provision of a common core curriculum in 1945, pupils at the technical school, coming, as most did, from working-class families, left post-primary school with trade training but no examination qualifications.

Governed by the same Board as other local post-primary schools, Palmerston North Technical School's role in the community was clearly as a provider of obedience training for 'the foot soldiers of society', preparing them to carry out their expected role as artisans, farm labourers and domestics. At the same time the School did not neglect a wider role, involving pupils in the liberal arts. That a very few students in the 1930s had examination success indicates the Technical School's provision for some academic education. Like other New Zealand technical high schools, try as its leaders might, the Technical High School and its successor were never able to over-come community prejudice against technical schools. When the core curriculum was established, the School increased its academic courses to assist the subsequent longer-term pupils to gain examination qualifications, as many students did. It also provided suitable courses for reluctant pupils forced to remain at school by the extended leaving age. The move to a new site was a logistical one forced by accommodation pressures, and not by change of educational philosophy. On the new site technical education continued under the name of Queen Elizabeth Technical College, with clear links of staff, logo, motto and colours to its predecessor. Like other technical high schools, Queen Elizabeth Technical College met the technology challenge by forming a technical institute within its organisational structure, on a site historically related to its predecessor. As with other technical schools, this move failed to halt the demise of a separate technical school in the city. Following the removal of the term 'technical' from its title, the College worked hard to establish itself as a place of comprehensive education. Eventually the Technical Institute became a tertiary establishment completely separate from the College. Academic courses were provided at the College but they failed to remove the prejudice against former technical high schools. Although its officials protested, the College received a large percentage of non-academic and low-achieving pupils. This reinforced prejudice against the College and it eventually became a very minor player in the education market of Palmerston North. Despite the best efforts of staff and leaders, Queen Elizabeth College could not escape its technical high school roots in the eyes of the public. The College move from a technical institution to being one which tried to fulfil the egalitarian spirit first set out in the 1930s mirrors the way in which legislation towards equal educational opportunity for all young people unintentionally but inevitably led to the demise of all technical high schools in New Zealand. Perhaps the position at Queen Elizabeth College was exacerbated by its place within the one High School Board of Governors in the city. It may not have been the policy of the Board to direct a majority of apparent low-achievers, the troubled and troublesome, and Maori, to the College but that is what happened. To prejudice against the memory of



technical high schools was added, for the College, a community concept that it was, indeed 'a dump for duds'.

The consideration of technical high schools in New Zealand, and that of Palmerston North, leads to the conclusion that, with the best intentions of providing equal educational opportunity for all students, the pursuit of that aim led eventually to, in the case of all technical high schools, their demise, and in Palmerston North to an educational establishment struggling to overcome its past and maintain a presence in that city.

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