

Proposal: Implementation of Compulsory Education in Scotland

The Education Act of 1633 marked the beginning of compulsory, state-funded education in Scotland. With this law, Scottish Parliament turned Scotland into one of the first nations to legally establish that every child, regardless of gender or socioeconomic status, has the right to a free and equal education. Despite the groundbreaking nature of the Education Act—the first in a series of evolving education legislation in Scotland—few historians have delved into why Scottish politicians believed that a mandatory education was a necessary investment for the country. The proposed project will investigate the cultural conditions, specifically the influence of the Kirk (Church of Scotland), that pushed Scottish Parliament to prioritize public education in its legislative practices when most other countries in this era did not see fit to do so.

The key cultural factor in Scotland establishing a nationwide school system was religion. The Reformation established the idea that people are responsible for their own salvation; this entails churchgoers being able to read the Bible for themselves rather than relying solely on church sermons. However, literacy was uncommon in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The Kirk believed that the best way to ensure that all citizens could read the Bible—thereby ensuring the salvation of the nation—was to make education more accessible. In 1560, the Kirk published *The First Book of Discipline* (an important primary source for the proposed project) which lays out plans for a parish-based school system. The Education Act of 1633 closely follows the ideas in *The First Book of Discipline*, which supports the theory that the Kirk was the force driving compulsory education in Scotland. This law did not limit education access to the wealthy or the males. It required that every child had a school in their parish and that the education be free.

Few secondary sources are dedicated to the Education Act of 1633. Most sources pertaining to public education in Scotland focus on the later Education Acts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A useful website is the online Church of Scotland: Church and Society Council, as it details the Education Act of 1633 and provides some historical context for the law, including the Kirk's advocacy for free public education. The monograph containing the most information about the history of compulsory education in Scotland is Edinburgh University Press' 2015 *The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland*. For the purposes of this proposed project, only the two chapters dealing with the era preceding and during the Education Act of 1633 are of substantial use. The first chapter, "Education in the Century of Reformation," details the Kirk's increased role in childhood schooling. The second chapter, "Urban Schooling in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Scotland," provides details of how the Kirk and Scottish Parliament intended the school system to work.

Primary sources pertaining to the origins of the Education Act of 1633 are difficult to access as most remain in archives at the University of Edinburgh and Scottish National Records; however, the primary documents that are accessible are of more help than secondary sources in researching the Kirk's cultural influence that led to the formation of a nationwide school system in Scotland. Several primary documents are in Latin, as that was the language of choice for intellectuals in the Early Modern period. Despite this language barrier, the databases being used for this project offer texts that have been either written in or translated into English and are therefore viable sources. *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707* is an online collection of digitized parliamentary records; having the exact wording of the Education Act of 1633 is integral to this project as it emphasizes the sweeping nature of the law. In addition to this, there are two databases with digitized documents from Early Modern Scotland containing

records from the Kirk and Scottish Parliament: *Scottish History Society Publications* and *Medieval and Early Modern Sources Online*. These online archives contain primary documents that focus heavily on religious beliefs in sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland, especially what religious and political leaders wanted for the future of the country.

Using these sources, the proposed project aims to contribute to a growing historiography on the Education Act of 1633 and prove that this law was central to the development of what eventually became one of the best school systems in the world. Additionally, the project seeks to establish the Kirk's role in changing the culture in Scotland to one that sees education as one of its core values, a cultural view that persists to the present.

I hereby pledge on my word of honor that I have neither given nor received help on this work.

Nicole Ford

Bibliography

Secondary Sources:

Anderson, Robert, Mark Freeman, and Lindsay Paterson, eds. *The Edinburgh History of Education in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

“Education Act 1633.” *World Heritage Encyclopedia*. Accessed April 9, 2019.
http://worldjournals.org/articles/eng/Education_Act_1633.

“School Establishment Act 1616.” *World Heritage Encyclopedia*. Accessed April 9, 2019.
<http://worldjournals.org/article/WHEBN0016114842/School%20Establishment%20Act%201616>

Stephens, W. B. “Literacy in England, Scotland, and Wales, 1500-1900.” *History of Education Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 545-71. Accessed March 14, 2019.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/368946>

Stevenson, John. *Fulfilling a Vision: The Contribution of the Church of Scotland to School Education, 1772-1872*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012.

The Church of Scotland Church and Society Council. “A History of the Church and Education.” *Education Representatives Handbook: A Guide to Good Practice For Church of Scotland Education Representatives on Local Authority Education Committees* no. 6. Accessed March 6, 2019.
http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/13293/302_C_and_S_R_eps_Handbook_Leaflet4.pdf

Primary Sources:

“The First Book of Discipline.” About Us. Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/important-documents/the-first-book-of-discipline-1560/>

Kirk, James, ed. *Stirling Presbytery Records, 1581-1587*. Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1981.

Miscellany of the Scottish History Society, vol. 10. Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1965.

Mullan, David George, ed. “Protestant piety in early-modern Scotland.” *Letters, Lives, and Covenants, 1650-1712*. Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 2008.

National Records of Scotland. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/>

“Act V: Ratification of the act of council regarding plantation of schools.” Legislation. Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707. Accessed September 20, 2019.
<https://www.rps.ac.uk/>

TannerRichie Publishing. Medieval and Early Modern Sources Online. Accessed September 20, 2019. <https://tannerritchie.com/memso.php>