
This collection assembles nineteen essays to elucidate the history of Scottish education in light of recent Scottish historiography. One of the editors’ central goals is to address the educational myth which purports that Scottish education has always been distinctive, accessible, and high quality. To varying degrees, the essays address these assumptions and their connection to Scottish identity. Temporally, the essays cover a period of a thousand years, beginning with medieval education from 1000-1300 and concluding with an assessment of twenty-first century education, which examines educational decisions as recently as 2012.

The editors have organized the volume chronologically, which allows the reader to observe the transformation of Scottish education over time. Matthew Hammond outlines the centrality of ecclesiastical influence in the development of medieval education. Kimm Curran addresses education in the medieval monasteries with a particular emphasis on libraries and literacy. Elizabeth Ewan examines urban education in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the attitudes that townspeople had towards it. Stephen Mark Holmes argues that the Reformation of the long sixteenth century was a church reform movement that transcended confessional divides, as evident in educational settings. While these essays elucidate the adoption and adaptation of continental ideas in Scotland during their respective periods, they would be well served by cross-reference to educational trends and developments on the continent, which would address some of the gaps that comparison to English education creates.

The collection then addresses developments in Scottish education in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. Lindy Moore examines sign-literacy rates as an entrée into the role of cultural values and the highly classed nature of
education. David Allan challenges the traditional narrative that examines universities during the Scottish Enlightenment through the lens of “purges and persecutions” (p. 100), and argues that to understand later intellectual developments one must examine the undergirding academic infrastructure. John Finlay explores the transformation of legal education from 1650 when legal education depended on foreign institutions until 1850 by which time Scotland had developed its own institutions and curriculum. John Stevenson examines the impact denominational concerns had on the development of a national system. Ewen A. Cameron investigates the diverse schools available in rural Scotland and the challenges they presented in the development of a centralized system. David Northcroft uses a local case study to challenge the national myth of education.

These essays study the shifting political climate of the period, consider how urbanization and Enlightenment ideas shaped education, and provide a critical link in the transition from pre-modern to modern Scottish education.

The last nine essays examine the transformation of Scottish education from an assorted group of schools into a centrally administered system. Jane McDermid concludes that school boards were integral in the formation of a national system. Christopher R. Bischof traces the development of professional teacher education from the end of the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. Lindsay Paterson negotiates the historiographical debate between democratic knowledge and intellectual rigour in the early twentieth century. Douglas Sutherland argues that, while adult education in Scotland from 1750-1950 paralleled developments in Britain, it offered a distinctive approach in autodidactic learning. Robert Anderson and Stuart Wallace argue that Scottish universities developed a national identity because they provided accessible and affordable education in the historic European tradition. Catriona M. M. Macdonald investigates “the protean nature of student lives” (p. 299) through the diverse, rather than unified, student voice. Fiona O’Hanlon and Lindsay Paterson explore changing attitudes towards Gaelic education in light of the 1872 Education act, which failed to acknowledge this important aspect of Highland culture. Martin Lawn and Ian J. Dreary argue
that the extensive research into Scottish education emerged from individual inquiry, and not from a unified research agenda. In the final essay of the collection, Walter Humes discusses the impact of the global educational reform ideas on rhetoric and decision making in Scotland. This article sheds light on current concerns of economic competitiveness, intellectual innovation, and more specifically, the role education should play in these developments. These essays reveal the impact of the centralization process on education and the source of Scottish myth of quality education, which is useful for understanding Scottish identity.

The editors express a desire to see these historical essays used in the process of answering contemporary educational concerns in Scotland and beyond. The volume sheds light on Scotland's educational history and the various reforming movements that shaped it over time, but needed more critical analysis of the connections between educational developments in Scotland and elsewhere. The collection, however, provides an avenue by which to start integrating the Scottish narrative into broader conversations about the history of education.

Marjorie Hopkins
University of Guelph