



THE SETTING

"If a sound system of nurture and education is maintained, it produces men of a good disposition, and these, in their turn, taking advantage of such education, develop into better men than their forbears..."

(Plato, *The Republic*)

Psomi! Paideia! Democratia!"
(Bread! Education! Democracy!)

(Athens crowds voicing their joy – and priorities – during the spontaneous demonstrations celebrating the fall of the military junta, 1974)

THE CENTRAL CHALLENGE

Any observer of the Greek educational scene will be struck by an initial and startling paradox. There is the great esteem in which education is held among all sections of the community as the defining factor both in shaping the Greek identity throughout its historic vicissitudes and in advancing the life-chances of individuals, fully reflected in the sacrifices which families are prepared to make for the education of their children. Yet there is a quasi-universally held view of the existing system as incapable of responding to this popular demand or meeting the aspirations of a highly motivated and gifted clientele. We do not exaggerate in saying that we hardly met anybody who does not have serious reservations about the system.

This contrast – which sees the great commitment to education as a force for both individual and social development dissipated and frustrated at almost every turn by a largely inappropriate system – is all the more paradoxical if one bears in mind the significant progress which has been made since the previous *OECD Review of Greek Education Policy* in 1979/80. The Background Report documents the enormous growth in provision and the major reforms of educational structures which have taken place, and for which successive governments deserve credit, as well as in the redefinition of aspects of the legal and administrative framework within which the system operates. These latter, however, have remained largely on paper, so that education is still bound up with an over-legalistic, centralised and politicised patronage-based system which stifles initiative and creativity. In our

visits to institutions we encountered widespread discontent and even anger with the self-imposed tyranny which pervades the system at all levels in terms of legal, administrative, structural and pedagogical rigidities. High standards are often achieved despite rather than because of the system. When to this is added the strong impression one gets of a system still geared essentially to preparing its clients for work in a craft economy and for a swollen public sector, the case for explicit and deliberate reform becomes all the more urgent.

Our concern, and one which is widely shared across the country, is that Greece should effectively prepare itself to exploit the enormous capacities of its people by improving its educational system. It should be asking itself:

- How can we identify and prepare the young people who will be leading Greece in its future role both in its changed geographical vicinity and as an active member in an increasingly united Europe?
- How can our education system make sure that we have the skills not only to secure a prodigious output from our agriculture, and to market it well, but also meet the needs of new patterns of industrial development and, more particularly, of a rapidly expanding service economy?
- How can Greek education ensure that its people become fully cognisant and tolerant of other cultures, while at the same time be sufficiently aware of and committed to its cultural heritage so as to avoid further incursions of pollution and the effects of crude commercial development?
- How can our educational system improve its interaction with society and contribute to lifelong learning?
- How can the educational institutions make sure that Greece fully exploits the developments in technology, particularly information technology?

Before pursuing the detailed implications of these concerns as they relate to various parts of the education system, and its administration and management, it would be useful to provide an overview of major issues and bottlenecks as they affect the system as a whole.

BACKGROUND FACTORS, FEATURES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Four general features which influence the position of education in Greece have to be noted.

Firstly, Greek education has had the advantage of serving, at least until recently, a traditionally *highly homogeneous society*, sustained by its deep-rooted Hellenic and Byzantine traditions, by a cohesive, state-supported religion and by strong family solidarity. It is a society strongly committed to equality and social justice and one which, in spite of enormous differences in the distribution of wealth, is less class conscious than is the case with other comparable countries.

The state is looked upon as the guarantor of egalitarianism, which is, however, not without its problems for education as we shall see later on. These problems are bound to be exacerbated by the recent influx of large numbers of immigrants and the return to their homeland of many Greek expatriates. There is a nascent pluralism in Greek society to which education will need to respond.

Secondly, education operates within a context of *great geographic contrasts and variety*, with corresponding differences in the distribution of population as between urban and rural areas, as well as great socio-economic differences between these two areas. Rural exodus remains a strong feature of Greek demography and largely accounts for the enormous growth of the two megalopolis, Athens/Piraeus and Thessaloniki, which together amount for just over 40 per cent of the total Greek population and an equal proportion of the country's economic activity. For education, one direct consequence of this demographic imbalance is that school-building space in towns is hard to find, or too expensive to acquire, while schools in rural areas are too small to be "economical" or to be endowed with an adequate range of educational options, of the kind, for example, that the polyvalent lyceum has been designed to provide. Responding to these imbalances places an additional premium on more effective policies for decentralisation.

Thirdly, account has to be taken of the particularities of the Greek economy and labour market. Traditionally an agricultural country, Greece has not experienced the significant shifts to the secondary and tertiary sectors which has been a feature of its fellow members in the European Union. The service sector has indeed been growing throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s, but industrial production remained stagnant, and actually decreased during the early 1990s. The overall economic prospects for the immediate future do not seem promising, according to the latest *OECD Economic Survey of Greece* (1995). "The signs of a recovery remain tenuous, with GDP growth unlikely to exceed 1 per cent in 1994, while unemployment is continuing to rise."

Greek industrial enterprises remain small in size and in terms of persons employed and more often than not are family operations. A significant proportion of the work force are self-employed. Against the background of a persisting stagnant economy, the rate of unemployment has grown to around 10 per cent, concentrating mainly among the young (20-24 years), of whom one in three remains unemployed. It is estimated, in the Background Report, that youth unemployment among the two categories of tertiary education graduates is 9.8 per cent for Technological Educational Institutions (TEIs) and 6.6 per cent of universities. Among secondary education graduates it is 12.9 per cent. Seeing that about 80 per cent of university graduates are employed in the public sector, already saturated, further employment opportunities for such graduates will no doubt get worse rather than improve.

The brief analysis above points to the general conclusion of a serious mismatch between educational output and the changing needs of the economy and

labour market. This relationship is of course difficult to pin down even under the best of circumstances; and in the case of Greece, matters are not facilitated by the absence of *systematic* analysis and monitoring of labour market developments. Such sporadic sectoral or regional studies as may have been carried out underlined the low compatibility of the secondary vocational education to the needs of industry. In addition, because of the very weak links which exist between educational institutions and the world of work, signals coming from the labour market are not readily absorbed within the educational system. The generally acknowledged rigidities of the system are held largely to blame for its lack of responsiveness. This is further demonstrated by the absence of co-operation between the educational system and the promising initiatives being undertaken by the Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED), with strong support from European Union funds, to strengthen industrial training through a regionally-based apprenticeship system.

Finally, reference needs to be made to the *political context* within which education operates. That education is becoming increasingly politicised, particularly in times of economic stringency and sharpened ideological differences, is a phenomenon common to many countries. But few other countries have experienced the *educational discontinuities* that Greece has suffered as a result of political changes, including changes of Education Ministers within the same government. (It has been estimated that over the last fifteen years education had an average of two ministers annually!) The history of education in Greece over the last twenty years is replete with educational reforms that successive governments have legislated for, as well as with the confusing array of reforms that were rescinded by subsequent governments or that remained on the statute book but were not implemented. They are all recounted in the Background Report. A main characteristic of these reform efforts is their episodic and partial nature, attempting to tackle specific aspects of education but without any coherent strategy defining the longer-term development of the system as a whole and its place in society. This lack of permanence and of a global vision has been an unsettling element among all those responsible for the management and running of the educational system, encouraging among them a feeling about the futility of supporting change, if such change is to be rechanged by the next government under pressure from its partisan groups. In education, as in other aspects of Greek political life, a certain element of populism and clientelism is always present in the interpretation of governmental action. Under the apt heading "The Curse of Sisyphus", the tortuous history of Greek educational reform is recounted in detail in Kazamias and Kassotakis (eds.), *Greek Education*, Athens, 1995, pp. 41 ff. (in Greek). It is to be hoped that the National Council for Education will be given a stabilising role in this respect.

And yet, in at least two areas of education it has proved possible to achieve a degree of consensus of permanent value. The first concerns the enthronement, in the mid-1970s, of the *demotic* as the official language of instruction at all levels (as

well as the official language of the state). The second, again beginning in the mid-1970s, was the laying of the foundations for the gradual evolution of the structure of the educational system as we know it today, and which no-one, to our knowledge, disputes – and definitely not us. If consensus was possible on these politically sensitive issues, there is every reason to believe that it can be extended to the many issues raised in our report, all directed at improving the effectiveness of the system.

MAJOR ISSUES AND BOTTLENECKS: AN OVERVIEW

The pressure of numbers

Statistically, Greece is a well-educated country. The Background Report records the remarkable progress in the quantitative growth of education since the last OECD review.

“Currently over a tenth of the population aged 25 to 64 years holds a tertiary education degree, about a quarter are secondary school graduates and around half are at least primary school graduates. Those with (...) less than primary schooling constitute about the remaining tenth of the population. More men than women hold tertiary education degrees, but the proportions are rather equal for other levels. The significant exception is the category ‘less than primary schooling’, where women far outnumber men (174 women for every 100 men).”

Between 1971 and 1991, the proportion of tertiary education graduates quadrupled and secondary education graduates doubled. Illiteracy rates also fell sharply: from 14 per cent of the population over 10 years of age in 1971 to 7 per cent in 1991, with only 1 per cent of those under 45 designating themselves as illiterate in 1991.

In terms of enrolments, those for pre-school and primary school have been shrinking since the 1980s, and will continue to do so in an accelerated manner during the 1990s, because of the decreasing birth rate. The demographic downturn is already affecting secondary school growth rates, beginning with lower secondary school and eventually hitting upper secondary whose enrolments had been consistently rising since 1970. It is interesting to note that while general secondary education has stabilised, technical/vocational education continues to expand. This is not unrelated to the fact that the proportion of upper secondary technical/vocational students in private schools stands at 16 per cent, as against 4 per cent for secondary general. Tertiary education experienced the highest growth rates of all, particularly during the 1980s, total enrolments rising from 121 000 in 1980/81 to 268 000 in 1989/90 and 294 000 in 1993/94. These staggering figures, however, have to be interpreted with caution for they include a large proportion – varying between 30 and 40 per cent, and sometimes more – of registered but “inactive” students, a problem to which we refer later in the report.

The situation depicted above, with all the regional variations that are analysed in the Background Report (Chapter 6), shows up social demand as the operative factor behind the rapid growth of education. This demand seems to function almost autonomously, with little relationship to the level of economic development or indeed to governmental policies. It reaches its apogee, and its most dramatic manifestation, at the point of entry into higher education, particularly universities. So much so that the competition for entry to universities can readily be identified as the overriding pressure point on the whole system – not only in terms of numbers (in a situation in which only one in four of the candidates are admitted) but also for the effect which this competition has on the lower levels of education, particularly the lyceum. In essence the lyceum is converted into a preparatory stage for university entry, at the expense of its other broader educational purposes; and not a very successful one at that, if we judge by the proliferation of private cramming schools (*frontisteria*) which have become such a conspicuous feature of the Greek educational scene.

We discuss these problems in greater detail later on. The general point to be stressed here is our conviction that a more rational system of selection into higher education is an indispensable piece of the total puzzle of Greek educational reform.

Resources

Meeting the demand for education, improving the educational infrastructure and raising quality are the three major challenges to Greek educational policy making. All three call for additional resources. Indeed, the inadequacy of resources is probably the biggest bottleneck in moving forward.

In spite of recent increases, Greece's expenditure on education remains at 4.2 per cent of the GDP and the share of public expenditure is 7 per cent. In times of expansion, some OECD countries devoted 20 per cent of their budgets to education, higher than for defence. In view of the claimant demand for education, and the problems that Greece faces in bringing its economy up to appropriate speed, this is self-evidently inadequate.

The inadequacy of publicly funded provision is obvious from the facts that a large number of pupils do not attend for a whole school day, but in shifts; that many schools are badly maintained, equipped and furnished; and, most significant and wounding to the self-confidence of the system and those who work in it, that the majority of parents feel it necessary to spend large sums of money in providing for additional education in private cramming schools. It has to be noted, though, that because of the high pressure for entry into university, the cramming phenomenon applies equally to students from "good" private schools as well as to those in the public system. There are insufficient resources to provide sufficient teaching spaces. Teachers complain that their conditions are poor and there is wholly insuffi-

cient in-service training. Yet many students spend Greek funds on taking university courses abroad and if the expenditures made on private education, crammers and study abroad were added to public spending, Greek educational expenditure would rise to about 6.5 per cent of GDP, *i.e.* it would be among the highest and not the lowest in the OECD countries.

It is easy for outsiders to say "spend more" and we acknowledge that our proposals will cost money. But at the same time Greece has impressive non-financial assets. There are deep resources of familial and community participation, of creativity and initiative that are not being exploited. And many of the most important changes demand changes in attitudes and style rather than new money.

Although there is a strong ethic in favour of universal public services, it does seem necessary to think of ways in which education can attract more resources. There is a good precedent in the training activities of the Manpower Employment Organisation supported financially by employers' and employees' contributions. On higher education, some parental contribution to fees and other expenses – depending on parental income – does not seem unthinkable to the examiners, although we understand this would be strongly resisted. One possibility would be to secure more places in universities by allowing local authorities to find the extra money needed. The prospect of additional local taxes and/or some parental contribution might be preferable to the heavy burdens carried by parents whose children go abroad to study, sometimes in poor quality universities. Universities might actively seek funds from foundations and/or wealthy Greeks living abroad, and seek funding for endowed chairs. They might explicitly examine the extent to which accepted university activities might be used to attract more funds. We have seen good examples – in Athens, Salonica and Heraclion – where higher education institutions had established co-operative activities with research centres in their vicinity, to their mutual advantage. At the school level, school committees are already raising funds to meet building and maintenance needs. Educational institutions need to remain true to their values, but the adoption of an entrepreneurial spirit could strengthen rather than weaken the quality of what is provided.

Within the public education budget itself, consideration could also be given to possibilities for the redeployment of resources from one sector to another, particularly in view of fluctuations in student numbers, as for example is the case with declining enrolments in compulsory schooling resulting from the demographic downturn.

Underlying social and ethical assumptions

The problems arise not only from the tunnel vision of particular interests but also from strong ethical commitments. There is a long Greek tradition of education as the main vehicle for the transmittal and maintenance from one generation to

another of the values which have shaped the specific qualities of Greek culture over its centuries-old historical development. Greeks feel strongly that this role of education needs to be firmly maintained, particularly in order to safeguard against the erosion of the Greek identity as the country gets increasingly merged into Europe.

This "national" role of education goes hand in hand with a strong belief in education as the royal road to social progress and individual development, and with an equally long Greek tradition of the state as the guarantor of opportunity. The principle of equity is quoted as a justification for centralisation, and for the necessity to have a legal base for action. But those forms of equality are now out-dated. They assume that equality requires all to suffer procedures and rules which ensure conformity to prestructured norms. They reflect an old-fashioned engineering model. More appropriate forms of democracy and equality attempt to avoid uniformity of provision and process in order to allow individuals to flourish, within generalised policy norms, through procedures moulded to the needs of individuals and communities in their time and place. This is expressive and participative equality.

Centralisation and legalism are also justified because they reduce the dangers attendant on patronage and clientele systems. But these are best met not by rigid procedures but by transparent forms of accountability achieved through audit, by multiple forms of evaluation, and by the diffusion of power through effective decentralisation. We note, indeed, a distressing lack of trust at many levels of the system. Thus students argue that more rigorous and regular assessment would make them subject to the political bias of their teachers. Teachers argue that to do away with the waiting list (the *epetiris*), based on seniority, would make teacher appointments forfeit to the clientele system. These beliefs are serious impediments to loosening up the system at several key points, and can be met by using devices similar to those used by other countries: Ombudsmen to receive complaints about unfair assessment, appointment practice of a public service commission (as in Cyprus) or the use of external examiners (as in the UK).

Mechanistic egalitarianism is evident in students' rights to free texts and food, the seniority list for public employment, irrespective of merit or fitness for the particular job (to which we return later), and the virtually unrestricted right to a diploma, once entry to university has been secured. As a result, the young are socialised early into the assumptions of a pensionariat, which stands in the way of effective teaching, learning and assessment patterns and the creation of the more sophisticated forms of individual enterprise.

These overriding assumptions all have largely negative connotations. They need to be displaced by a professional ethic which assumes that teachers will use their expertise in an altruistic regard for the needs of their clients. This classic view of professionalism is now being extended by the new professionalism which requires professionals to cease hiding behind their esoteric knowledge and skills

and to actively seek out the expressions of needs and the knowledge of their clients with whom they come into an active co-operative relationship. This is not only appropriate to the educational task, but also makes for a more satisfying vocation for the teacher.

Raising quality

Given the strong social and familial commitment to it, the Greek system should be capable of producing high quality education. In some respects it is so, but the acknowledged faults include:

- The mind-set associated with the single text book, which often takes the form of mental anorexia, is reinforced by the persistence of the same approach in higher education. This colludes with the memorisation imposed in the university entry examinations and affects the nature of secondary school teaching by graduates who have suffered within the same tradition. Teachers, at all phases, are discontented at lack of freedom.
- There are few signs of expressive life in the schools. In those we visited, no children's work was on display. Most schools are, indeed, dreary buildings displaying no signs of an educative environment.
- Use of a parallel private system (the crammers) by those who can afford it and by most families is demoralising to the state schools, and deflects pupils' commitment to work in them. But it is itself a symptom of rejection of the quality of what is provided.

Several measures are needed to raise quality. We will discuss them in more detail below. In brief, however, we envisage a connected virtuous circle of improvement which will counter the existing vicious cycle of characteristics making for poor quality, as follows:

- The prime resource in education, apart from the pupils themselves, are teachers. They need to be recruited and promoted selectively and not on seniority listing, trained effectively, and given all assistance through in-service training, counselling and better conditions to convert the teaching force into a fully professional body.
- The dead weight of the centralised text-based curriculum needs to be mitigated by teacher discretion to adapt it to local needs and interests and their own professional judgements.
- Decentralisation needs to ensure that responsibility rests with those who provide and receive the education.

- Work should be evaluated to ensure better quality through both external scrutiny and self-critique.

All of this implies a willingness to move away from the present system with its heavy weight of bureaucratic as opposed to educational power.

New policy-making and management structures

The last major issue/bottleneck that we wish to raise relates to the governance of the educational system. We have already given more than strong hints that a release from the centralised, legalistic and bureaucratic shackles under which the system endeavours to function is an essential condition for its revitalisation. We devote the two last chapters of our report to this problem and what new approaches could be applied to improve it in the interests of enhancing the overall effectiveness of education, commensurate with national objectives and the aspirations of the population. Our proposals revolve around the triptych:

- redefining the role of the Ministry with a view to improving its policy/planning and thinking capacity;
- putting into practical effect the decentralisation of decision-making and giving greater autonomy to institutions so as to enhance their creativity and freedom of action within centrally set norms;
- instituting objective systems of evaluation and audit at all levels, essential for both self-development and monitoring progress.

We believe moving in these directions to be a *sine qua non* for any strategy for change.