

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

The Background Report, prepared by the Greek authorities for the purpose of this review, gives a well documented comprehensive picture of the present state of Greek education and its evolution over time, including an *aperçu* of many of its shortcomings and of the factors behind them. It constitutes essential reading for an understanding of the educational scene in Greece and for any discussion of the predicaments and challenges which confront educational policy thinking and making in the country.

In the Examiners' Report we have endeavoured to present a critical analysis of these problems as they relate to overall policy and as they surface at various levels of the educational system and in the politico-administrative structures within which the system operates. In each area we have identified specific problems calling for remedial action and have put forward a series of concrete proposals/recommendations of what form such action could take. Summaries of these are available within the various chapters of our report and need not be reproduced here. But at least one general conclusion needs to be emphasized, namely *that such is the extent of the reform needed that nothing short of radical change will do if Greek education is to be liberated from the frustrating effects of the many predicaments with which it has been traditionally beset.*

For the purposes of the present discussion, in addition to initial Greek comments on the general conclusion stated above and on the overall diagnosis in the Examiners' Report, four groups of issues have been identified for the interest they carry, not only for Greece but for other countries as well. They are:

- meeting the demand for education, with particular reference to resource and financing issues;
- raising the quality of school education, including an enhanced role for technical and vocational education;
- efficiency and quality of higher education;
- educational policy-making, administration and management.

To facilitate discussion, under each of these areas we list, without being exhaustive, a number of the main considerations and questions which arise.

EDUCATIONAL DEMAND, RESOURCES AND FINANCING

We indicated earlier in the report that the inadequacy of public resources is probably the biggest bottleneck in improving the state of Greek education. Greece is by no means alone among OECD countries in struggling with this problem. But its own situation is aggravated by:

- the comparatively low level of public educational expenditure in relation to GDP (4.2 per cent) and in the share of total public expenditure (7 per cent);
- the enormity of the problems that call for urgent and simultaneous attention, namely:
 - meeting the demand for education, particularly pre-school and higher education;
 - improving the educational infrastructure, in terms of better equipment and maintenance of existing schools and the building of new ones, so as to raise the quality of school life and, in particular, get rid of the shift system within which most schools are now operating;
 - raising the quality of school education, with all that this implies for teacher recruitment and training, curriculum reform, pedagogical materials and school support services, among others.

In the light of the above, at least two questions arise for discussion:

- Recognising that additional resources are needed, where will these be found? If little can be expected from the central budget, in a situation of cutbacks in public expenditure, could extra local funds be raised by the regions or municipalities to meet their own educational needs under the decentralisation measures currently in progress? Seeing that, in spite of the much cherished constitutional right to free public education, Greek families already spend large sums of money, amounting to some 2.3 per cent of GDP, on private education, cramming schools and study abroad, what possibilities exist of channelling part of these funds into improving public education?
- Even if additional resources are forthcoming, it is unlikely that these will be enough to meet all needs. The question of priority setting is thus posed. How will these priorities be established? What scope is there within the public educational budget for the redeployment of existing resources from one sector of education to another, including the pursuit of new policy objectives, such as, for example, working towards a system of lifelong learning on the lines advocated by the Ministers of Education at their recent OECD meeting?

SCHOOL EDUCATION

The many problems confronting school education in Greece are expounded in Chapter 2, as are the specific suggestions we put forward, all directed at improving

the position of schooling and raising its quality. A summary of our conclusions and recommendations was presented earlier in this report and a useful starting point for the present discussion could be an initial Greek reaction to the validity and *practicability* of these proposals.

Noting that *a)* we see no major problem concerning the existing structure of the educational system, except for problems of articulation between various levels and branches; and *b)* questions of resources and infrastructure deficiencies will have been considered under the previous item, it is suggested that the discussion concentrates on specific proposals we have put forward in the following areas:

- *Compulsory schooling*, in particular:
 - better co-ordination between pre-school and primary provision, and between the primary school and the *gymnasium*, including a more purposeful role for the primary school and *gymnasium* certificates;
 - possibilities for curriculum choice in the last two grades of the *gymnasium* and improved provision of guidance to pupils in the choice of upper secondary education.
- *The lyceum*, in particular:
 - a stronger, more autonomous identity of the leaving certificate of the general Lyceum to adequately reflect the full range of curriculum objectives at this level and not merely as a preparatory stage for higher education;
 - abolition of the single textbook system;
 - rigorous promotion of the polyvalent Lyceum.
- *Technical and vocational education*, in particular:
 - measures to enhance its status, such as widening access possibilities to further and higher education, adapting its management structures to better respond to the local economic community, establishing closer links with continuing and on-the-job training;
 - reconsideration of the division of tasks between the technical lycea and the IEKs;
 - a more rational and co-ordinated approach to the distribution of responsibilities between the Ministry of Education, other ministries and the OAED.
- *School curricula*: drastic revision of the instruments and methods for defining their content and for implementing curriculum reform for all school education, including:
 - definition of a core curriculum for all secondary education;
 - better adaptation to local and regional needs and conditions;

- improved methods of assessing pupils' performance with regard to set curriculum objectives;
 - redefinition of the role and tasks of the Pedagogical Institute in this area as well as in educational research and other school support services.
- *Teachers*: the central question being how to establish criteria for teaching appointments and promotion based on objective assessment of qualifications and competence rather than exclusively on seniority (see Chapter 2 of the Examiners' Report).

HIGHER EDUCATION

As with the previous item, the conclusions and proposals which arise from our analysis of problems confronting Greek higher education – by far the most politically sensitive issues in any discussion of Greek education – are summarised in the last paragraph of Chapter 3 of the Examiners' Report. Here again, it would be useful to have an initial Greek reaction to the general tenor of our conclusions before embarking on a more detailed discussion of key issues in this area.

The following issues have been identified for this discussion.

- *A more rational planning of higher education intake and related questions of resource allocation.* This would involve, in particular:
- enabling institutions of higher education to know or to control their annual intake of students and to allocate funding or to recruit teaching staff in relation to specific institutional needs; this to be done in the context of a clearly defined national framework based on an appraisal of the present and future needs of the economy and society;
 - addressing the problem of the large number of "inactive students" for the distorting effect which this has on new admissions and the commitment of higher education as a serious pursuit;
 - encouraging the raising of institutional income, from local taxation or private sources, additional to that allowed from national funds;
 - authorising certain forms of properly accredited *private* institutions in order to meet unsatisfied demand and enable more Greek students to study in Greece rather than abroad.
- *Reform of higher education curricula and teaching methods,* in particular:
- revision of entrance examination curricula and procedures designed to test individual judgement and critical ability rather than sheer memorisation;

- as with secondary school curricula, abolition of the single textbook system which is at the root of the prevalence of memorisation as the yardstick of student success;
 - giving students greater freedom to pursue the subjects of their choice within degree courses and doing away with the practice of filling courses with students who have not opted for them;
 - ensuring the full-time commitment of higher education teaching staff to their students, to research, and other scholarly activities in return for adequate pay;
 - clarifying the relationships between the quality and status of courses offered at universities and TEIs.
- *Institutional autonomy and governance*, in particular:
- replacing the present central control over finance by the delegation of lump sum budgets based upon agreement about student intakes and other commitments: the control on expenditure to rely on agreed objectives and on ensuring that spending is related to them. Thus institutions should be able to appoint their own staff, without reference to the Ministry, within an agreed staffing budget;
 - institutions to be subject to effective audit systems and transparent appointments and contracting procedures;
 - need for institutions to install more effective management and planning systems, including the possibility of involving external groups, particularly employers, in an advisory capacity.
- *Evaluation*:
- the need for establishing a thorough system of objective evaluation of both teaching and research; and the proposal for setting up an expert Evaluation Centre for Education, free of the Ministry, to advise on and monitor the evaluation arrangements throughout the system.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY-MAKING, ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

As we state in the first paragraph of Chapter 4 in our report “at the heart of many of the problems we have discussed (...) lies the highly centralised, highly bureaucratised politico-administrative system within which education operates. Overall, it makes of education a *closed* system, not easily amenable to change and innovation”. And we emphasize that releasing policy making from its overdependence on the sanction of laws and the deadening weight of the administrative practices which these laws give rise to, is an essential condition for infusing dynamism and responsiveness in the educational system.

To this end, we have put forward a coherent set of specific proposals under the headings around which the present discussion could be organised:

- *Decentralisation*, with the accent on:
 - clearer definitions of the rights and responsibilities of the different levels, from the Minister to the individual teacher, student and parent;
 - increased powers for local authorities in determining the educational needs of their area and appropriate resources to meet them;
 - within such a framework, more freedom to the individual school, through school committees, in the management of their affairs;
 - endowing universities with a larger degree of effective autonomy, as already mentioned.
- *Establishing a system of evaluation*, at all levels and phases of the system, so as to guarantee standards and good practice in institutions which are released from unnecessary central control and regulations, and generally provide objective and publicly recognised guarantees of both quality and equitability.
 - as an initial step, the setting up of an independent Centre for Educational Evaluation, as already mentioned, which could eventually evolve into a national agency for monitoring evaluation in ways which ensure that evaluation will not be used for clientage purposes.
- *Changes in central planning and policy making*, in particular:
 - better co-ordination between the Ministry of Education and other ministries and agencies involved in education and training activities, especially the Manpower Employment Organisation;
 - drastic review of the role, functions and organisation of the Ministry of Education to relieve it of its present routine and bureaucratic functions and improve its planning, policy making and steering capacity for the achievement of nationally agreed targets and objectives;
 - the need for an overall strategy for change to guide the future development of education in Greece, with the necessary consultation and consensus-building mechanisms and procedures: a possible new role for the National Council for Education in this process.