

INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this review of educational policy in Greece, we visited the country from 13th to 28th February 1995 and we wish, at the outset, to express our appreciation to our Greek hosts for the effective arrangements which they made for our visit. We were enabled to have intensive and frank discussions with a wide range of political and educational leaders and administrators, at both central and local levels, and also to obtain first-hand experience of a representative sample of educational institutions – universities, technological institutes and schools at all levels – in various parts of the country.

We also had at our disposal the provisional text of the Background Report, prepared by the Ministry of Education, which, in its description and critical analysis of recent developments and the present state of Greek education, greatly facilitated our task. Its comprehensive coverage has made it possible for us to avoid repeating descriptive and factual accounts of education in Greece and to concentrate rather on essential policy issues and unresolved problems which seem to us to call for critical comment and/or suggestions for their solution. (The final version of the Background Report is reproduced in full as Part One of the present publication.)

Our report has been largely influenced by our direct observations during our visit. Its completion was much helped by the lively discussions which took place at a widely representative seminar of Greek and foreign experts, organised by the Greek Ministry of Education in Athens on 20-22 October 1995, on the basis of a preliminary statement of issues and conclusions which we had prepared for the occasion following our visit. The coverage of our report is broad, encompassing the whole system of education and the policy/administrative structures that underpin it – or rather thwart it. We have organised our discussions under six main areas.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the setting and background within which education operates and the main issues and bottlenecks with which educational policy has to grapple. In Chapter 2 we discuss specific problems relating to the school system while Chapter 3 does the same for higher education. The emphasis throughout has been on how to improve the performance of the system, highlighting the imperative need of action to overcome current deficiencies in the quality and relevance of education at all levels of the system. Issues in the planning and

management of education are discussed in Chapter 4, with the emphasis on giving effect to policies for decentralisation and greater devolution of decision making to regional, local and institutional levels. Together with the establishment of objective systems of evaluation and accountability, we consider this as the corner stone of all reform efforts. Chapter 5 stresses the need for instituting a coherent strategy for change and outlines the essential objectives and components of such a strategy. Chapter 6 gives a summary of the main findings and recommendations, presented as a set of "Issues for Discussion" to guide the deliberations of the OECD Education Committee on the occasion of its educational policy review of Greece at its meeting in Paris on 2nd April, 1996. (A number of reform measures introduced by the Greek authorities subsequent to our report are presented in the annex at the end of Part Two.)

A word of explanation as to the approach taken in our report would be in order here. That Greek education faces urgent and serious problems no one doubts. The situation is described across all sections of the community and there is also widespread familiarity with the general nature of these problems, as well as a considerable amount of research and analytical work on them. Public debate on education is a regular feature of the Greek political scene as well as among teachers, academics, administrators and employers, not to mention students and pupils themselves and their parents. What seems to be less clearly understood among many circles is the way in which these problems are inter-related and that *ad hoc* or partial policies for their resolution cannot be efficacious.

We have, therefore, felt it necessary in our report, without pretending to present a research-based analysis of Greek education, to provide nonetheless a conspectus of the problems and suggest possible approaches to their solution, drawing also on the experience of other comparable countries. Our concern has been to bring home to all those who have a say in shaping the future of education in Greece that nothing short of *radical change*, and the political will behind it, will do if Greek education is to be liberated from the frustrating effects of the many predicaments with which it has been traditionally beset.

We know that the Minister and others responsible for education at various levels share this view. This is why we have chosen to be severely critical of many of the prevailing features of the system, at the expense of discussing what is already good, and on putting forward wide-reaching and drastic proposals for reform. We are, of course, aware of the difficulties involved in moving in the proposed directions. Other countries have experienced similar difficulties. But we are also aware of, and applaud, the evident determination which we have seen on many sides to face and act on the issues we have raised, as amply demonstrated at the October 1995 Athens seminar. And we do believe that the bases exist for a political and professional consensus not only about the diagnosis of the problems but also on the need for a comprehensive and sustained attack on them. We hope that our

report can contribute to consolidating this nascent consensus and further galvanise the determination to act, having the well-being of future generations and the vitality of Greek society in its new European context uppermost in mind. The quality of the people and of the society which they constitute remains the ultimate criterion of educational action.