

# Final report on educational practices in Greece

Student Diversity and Academic Writing Project

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## Disclaimer:

This resource has been produced by the HEFCE-funded Student Diversity and Academic Writing (SDAW) Project based at Lancaster University Management School and conducted in conjunction with the London School of Economics. The project website carries more information, [www.sdaw.info](http://www.sdaw.info).

During the country visits to India, China and Greece we set out to learn about the HE system in the three countries primarily in terms of educational practices at tertiary level that would be relevant to those students that would continue their education in the UK – none of the videos or reports we have produced are offered with a view to characterising HE systems in China, India and Greece in their entirety.

Prior to publication this report has been read and commented on by other members of the team (and others). These comments are gratefully received. However, it is important to stress that this report is based on the personal interpretations of the author.

For a shorter and more general overview of undergraduate education in Greece (or China, or India), readers may wish to refer to the website of the Student Diversity and Academic Writing Project - [www.sdaw.info](http://www.sdaw.info). It provides access to a number of short films (10-15 minutes) on educational practices in each of these countries as well as additional reports and resources. It also offers materials that might be used during recruitment and as part of induction of new students.

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## **1. Overview of Greek higher education system**

This overview serves as an introduction to the Greek HE system, it provides vital background information. Some of the aspects presented here will be explored in more detail in the body of the report.

The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNERA or YPEPTH) is responsible for the national education policy and for the supervision of the various public institutions. Tertiary education in Greece is divided into:

- University Education, which is provided by Advanced Educational Institutes (AEIs). The mission of Greek universities is “to ensure a high level of theoretical and all-round training for the future scientific workforce of the nation” (EKEP, 2008). In 2007 there were 20 AEIs.<sup>1</sup>
- Higher technological education is offered by Technological Education Institutes (TEIs). This type of education focuses on science, technology and applied research and is more closely allied to industry. In 2007 there were 14 TEIs.<sup>2</sup>

The structure of the Greek higher education (HE) system is considered to be ‘binary’, which is to say that universities and non-university institutions exist alongside one another and are subject to a common system of regulation (Kyvik, 2004, p.394).<sup>3</sup> AEIs and TEIs are state-funded, self-governing and self-administered legal entities. Greek academics are employed as public servants (Stamoulas, 2005, p.47).

In addition to the public education institutions there are a number of private education providers that operate at tertiary level. Private education providers are not currently recognised by the Greek state. Whilst the lack of recognition of institutions – and the degrees they award – has not kept their graduates from joining taught graduate courses abroad (or from entering private sector employment in Greece and elsewhere), their ambiguous status is testament to a continuing debate about the role, quality and legitimacy of the private sector in Greece (see below). According to policies in operation since 1996 the Greek state seeks to provide unhindered access to higher education (Eurydice, 2004, p. 36). However, given that all education in Greece is offered for free – according to article 16 of the constitution – it is perhaps unsurprising to find that demand for higher education significantly outstrips supply. This means that entry is restricted to those students who perform successfully at national level examinations. The Pan-Hellenic exams – as they are known – take place at the second and third grade of secondary education, *Eniaio Lykeio* (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, [http://www.ypepth.gr/en\\_ec\\_page1531.htm](http://www.ypepth.gr/en_ec_page1531.htm)).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These include universities, polytechnics and Higher Fine Arts Institute as well as the Hellenic Open University.

<sup>2</sup> The British Council notes that “The Higher State Council is currently questioning the ‘university status’ of TEIs and the professional rights gained by their graduates.” (British Council, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> In this sense Greek HE is organised similarly to most other European countries (Belgium, Finland Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, etc.) although it is unlike the UK system, which has upgraded polytechnics and has thus become ‘unified’ (Kyvik, 2004, p.395)

<sup>4</sup> The *Eniaio Lykeio* represents the upper secondary level of schooling and Greece and is post-compulsory. Students study at this level between the ages of fifteen and eighteen (Eurydice, 2003, p.6). For access to HE there are some

The academic year in Greece is organised into two semesters that consist of (at least) 13 full teaching weeks and three weeks of exams. Though the length of an undergraduate degree has been four years (longer in certain applied programmes, e.g. medicine, architecture, etc) most students in Greece have taken significantly longer to complete their undergraduate studies. There have been reforms to Greek Higher Education in 2007 that has sought to address this. We will discuss this in detail in the report. The undergraduate degree and diploma in Greece is called the *ptychio*. It is commonly awarded at the departmental level (see below). The language of instruction is Greek, though private institutions might teach in English.

Students at public institutions do not only study for free; they also receive textbooks (and / or study materials) free of charge. Undergraduates and postgraduates are entitled to free health care. Male students can defer compulsory military service for the duration of their studies. None of these benefits apply to students at private universities.

Public sector study provision at postgraduate level is a relatively new venture in Greece (since 1992) and is currently restricted to universities.<sup>5</sup> Attending a postgraduate programme does incur fees.<sup>6</sup> It leads to a Postgraduate Diploma of Specialisation (*diploma metaptychiakon spoudon*), which is similar to a Masters degree in the UK. As the degree title suggests, progression equals increased specialisation in the same subject previously studied at undergraduate level; conversion courses are rare. In terms of the duration taught postgraduate programmes last for a minimum of one year and a maximum of two. Beyond this, students can proceed for their doctorate (*didaktorikon*). Doctorates completion time varies and it starts from three years.

During the latter part of our fieldwork, the Greek higher education system has been undergoing major changes brought about by the implementation of a new law related to university governance, quality control, length of studies and exams ([http://www.ypepth.gr/nomos\\_plaisio.pdf](http://www.ypepth.gr/nomos_plaisio.pdf) 17 March 2007). Most contentious are the amendments to article 16 of the constitution, which makes education the exclusive responsibility of the state. Among students and staff it has led to widespread protests and demonstrations against the commercialisation of higher education in Greece. Staff and students fear that diverting funds from public institutions into the private sector would ultimately threaten the quality of the higher education provision (<http://www.wes.org/ewenr/07feb/europe.htm>). Even though demonstrations are a regular occurrence in Greece, some of the more recent events have actually escalated into rioting. Strikes too, continued and as in previous years and exam periods were interrupted.

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special categories that apply to some 3% of available places in each programme. It applies to Greeks living abroad, foreign nationals, Muslims from Thrace and people with special needs (Eurybase, 2004, section 6.6).

<sup>5</sup> TEIs have to cooperate with university partners in order to award postgraduate degrees (and many are looking to cooperating with overseas partners).

<sup>6</sup> According to the British Council, fees for postgraduate courses range from 5,800 to 14,000 Euro. (British Council, 2007).

By November 2007 University World News reported that protests were still continuing and possibly escalating: "...students and trade unions are flexing their muscles, preparing for dynamic intervention"

(<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20071115140551103>).

Whether, which and how far the reforms will be implemented remains to be seen – the current government is relying on a slim majority (ibid.). (For the OECD perspective on the recent developments in Greece, see their report on Economic survey of Greece 2007: Improving tertiary education, OECD, 2007). The length of studies, resits and political power has been affected as to a great extent by the new law and it will be discussed in detail later on in this report.

## ***2. Methodology for country visits***

Some elements of the methodology are common to all three countries and these are reported first. The specifics of the visits to Greece can be found in the latter part of this section (number of institutions visited, mechanisms of access, etc.). All participants in the study were promised anonymity and hence data reported is not attributed to specific institutions, departments or individuals.

The application for research funding was based on a number of pilot studies. Focus groups had been conducted with groups of international students during the academic years 2003/04 (at the LSE) and 2004/05 (both at Lancaster and the LSE), by Niall Hayes and Lucas Introna, who were also leading the MSc programme at Lancaster. These sessions were taped and provided an early indication of educational practices in China, India and Greece.

With the beginning of the actual SDAW project in January 2005 the team – complemented by Edgar Whitley (LSE) and Anja Timm (Lancaster) – compiled a new schedule of questions for focus groups which were conducted in the beginning of the academic year 2005/06. A second round of focus groups – with the same students – took place after they had submitted their first assessed essay and this provided more detailed pointers in terms of students writing practices. The new schedule based on the focus group questions was piloted during the first visit to Greece (in March 2005). At the time we were also exploring the use of a questionnaire – both in the UK and during the country visits.<sup>7</sup>

Several versions of the schedule of questions were put together for different groups of interviewees (students, staff, and other relevant parties involved in the transfer of students to the UK or knowledgeable about students' transitions). The basic set of questions was asked during fieldwork in all three countries and by all researchers. Other questions were added as new and specific information emerged. In Greece, the political context emerged as particularly relevant, as did the specific teaching practices and the ways in which Greek students engaged with literature during the progression of their courses and as part of their preparation for exams. The difference between public sector and private sector institutions was also central to our focus. With regard to public provision, we were also keen to understand the different approach to undergraduate education across a diverse sample of institutions.

On the overseas visits we intended to conduct research only at the type of institutions that actually supplied students to the UK (and more specifically to universities such as Lancaster and the LSE). For the closest match we consulted current and past students' files (going back 3 years) on taught graduate

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<sup>7</sup> The SDAW Project questionnaire was in part based on the Academic Integrity Survey produced by Don McCabe. A number of questions that were originally developed for the questionnaire were subsequently moved into the schedule of questions for interviews and focus groups.

programmes in business and management studies.<sup>8</sup> In this way we established a list of sending universities as well as a list of the type of subjects that would have been attended at undergraduate level (these differed in the various countries).

The organisation of country visits drew heavily on the various prior contacts, i.e. former colleagues, former students, university friends, etc. etc. We also sought the advice of the units of the two universities that might provide knowledge and or contacts (International Office, Alumni Office, Recruitment Office, and Branch Offices) as well as the British Council. These contacts varied in quantity as well as quality for each of the three countries.

We began to set up the visits several weeks prior to our trips. Sometimes we had to write (cold) to the director, VC, or international Office; in other cases we had names of programme directors or lecturers who we contacted directly. All visits were timed not to interfere (and in turn be limited by) the busy beginning of the year, religious or national holidays and exam periods. We formally requested a visit to the institution and asked for interviews with teaching staff and officials (where necessary) and requested that we would be allowed to sit in on lectures and that focus groups with students be set up on our behalf. We also asked to be granted a tour of the campus, including the library.

Visits varied in duration and intensity: sometimes we would visit for several days, at other times we were in attendance for no more than a few hours. We sought to balance the organised programme (whenever there was one set by the university) with everyday type of activities, e.g. we ate in the canteen, used the campus photocopy shops, internet cafes, etc. to facilitate conversations with staff and students. We also sought opportunities for participant observation wherever possible, i.e. attending lectures ad hoc, visiting libraries independently (which allowed us to check out collections, access arrangements and student use). In addition we conducted interviews with the various British Council teams, education agents, alumni and local colleagues. Some of the British Council offices also kindly arranged focus groups for us. We also attended education fairs where possible in an effort to appreciate the diversity of students coming to the UK and their concerns about studying abroad.

Most of the interviews and focus groups that we conducted were tape recorded; though not all. Sometimes it seemed inappropriate to even ask, at other times interviewees were uncomfortable and sometimes there was simply no location that allowed for audio recording (noisy overhead fans, etc.). Research interviews and focus groups were semi-structured, i.e. based on our schedule of questions (at least at the outset). We also took photographs and collected hard data whenever possible, e.g. we photocopied exam questions, bought or photocopied books, journals and textbooks, collected instructions and lecture notes such as they were available to students as well as flyers, etc. The taped data was transcribed and analysed together with the other data.

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<sup>8</sup> Social science type business and management programmes were prioritised over those with a mainly quantitative focus (accounting, finance, economics) as issues of academic writing were less pronounced in these.

Greece: Anja Timm conducted two visits to Greece in March 2005 and in March / April 2006 (three and a half person weeks in total). The first visit was a pilot and intended to test the schedule of questions, access arrangements and overall feasibility and practicalities of the country visits etc. The second visit focused on data collection only. Edgar Whitley conducted additional interviews with former participants of the Greek HE system now studying at the LSE. Lucas Introna and Niall Hayes also conducted focus groups with Greek students as they arrived in Lancaster to commence their postgraduate study.

Niall Hayes conducted three visits to Greece over the project period where he interviewed academics, current students and alumni. A final visit in 2008 was undertaken where he explicitly focussed on the current reforms planned for Greek higher education. In February 2008, Maria Katsorchi-Hayes conducted additional research on the reforms. She interviewed, over the phone, students and a high ranking official in the National Council for Education (Ethniko Symvoulío Paideias - ESYP), which is an autonomous advisory body for the Ministry of Education.<sup>9</sup>

Access to HE institutions in Greece was quite straightforward and could be described as easy: Greek universities are large publicly funded institutions and open to the public; our movements and enquiries were entirely unrestricted. We also benefited from the fact that so many academics in Greece (especially the younger ones) attended university in the UK and were happy to make comparisons. This did not only cover their experience as students, for many had taught in British universities too, either as graduate teaching assistants or as early career academics. Without Greek language competency we relied on the English language skills of interviewees and their willingness to translate – on the spot – for others.

During the 2005 visit, Greek university lecturers were on strike. In fact, strikes are a common feature of Greek higher education and occurred again in 2006, albeit after our visit. The timing of the strike in 2005 did restrict our opportunities for observation and access to student groups somewhat (because there was no teaching, focus groups were difficult to set up), but it also led to a whole host of conversations about the state of Greek universities that we might have missed otherwise. Both visits included the annual election of student representatives, but again, this added another dimension to our understanding of the role of politics in higher education in Greece rather than simply 'interfering' with the research.

In total we visited seven different institutions, which included traditional universities based in Athens and Thessaloniki (the centres of HE in Greece) as

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<sup>9</sup> ESYP was recreated in 2003 to guarantee the widest consensus possible on issues relating to educational policy and practices. The aim was: 'to create a community forum where dialogue can occur between a diverse group of policy makers, academics and community members resulting in an amelioration of educational opportunities in Greece'. ([http://www.ypepth.gr/el\\_ec\\_category3908.htm](http://www.ypepth.gr/el_ec_category3908.htm)).

well as technical education institutions and university departments based on the islands. The majority of institutions visited were state-funded ones, but we also went to private colleges to appreciate the differences. In the seven institutions visited we spoke to 23 students in five focus groups and 14 lecturers. Academic staff would often refer also to their own experience as students (in Greece and, where applicable, in the UK) and about their experience as staff (again, in both countries, where appropriate). Interviews with academics ranged from 45 minutes (in once case) to several hours (in some three cases). Most interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes. We spoke to a range of HE staff: senior academics (Professors and Assistant Professors) as well as junior members (newly appointed, some on temporary contracts). Focus groups with students were usually set to last an hour, but often took longer.

In addition to these formal interviews there were many opportunities for us to observe Greek HE practices and to ask students and staff about these. Additional conversations with students took place during the educational fairs we attended. These allowed for an appreciation for the many varied motivations of Greek students to seek higher education in the UK. We also conducted two interviews with educational agents (one lasting 90 minutes, the second two hours), four interviews with British Council staff (with varying responsibilities – each lasting roughly an hour) and one interview with a representative of an alumni association (90 minutes). Lastly, we spoke at length to our Greek colleagues in British universities (i.e. outside the actual visits to Greece). Again, some of the conversations were recorded, others were of an ad hoc nature.

In terms of secondary sources, this representation of the Greek higher education system is restricted to those sources that are available in English (most Greek academics publish primarily in Greek). It benefits, however, from the many reports produced by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs published in conjunction with European Union bodies.

### ***3. Thematic presentation of Greek data***

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Given the importance of ancient Greece to the development of European thought and institutions, its intellectual and political history, it is perhaps surprising to find that universities were established only relatively recently. Indeed, the original notion of the 'academy' as a place of teaching philosophy goes back to Plato. But whilst the concepts and the terminology have been used in educational contexts worldwide, the institutionalisation of independent higher learning in Greece was constrained through Ottoman domination (Eurydice, 2000). The first University on Greek territory was the Othonian University, which was founded in 1837.<sup>10</sup> The first university established by the Greek state is the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (in 1925).

The event that is influential for the state of political affairs at Greek Universities was the rebellion of students in November 1974 against the dictator Papadopoulos. Students at the National Engineering School (Polytechnio) lost their lives as the tanks crashed the main gate of the university in order to stop riots against the dictator. The students who died at this tragic incident are equivalent to war heroes for many in the Greek society. This incident led to the establishment of universities as 'asylums' (asylo) which means that whoever student or not enters the university building cannot be arrested by the police or the army. This has caused a lot of controversy in modern Greece as groups that are not students have many times occupied university buildings and vandalise them.

A second landmark in the recent educational history of Greece was the educational law of 1982 which established the representation of political parties within universities and gave the authority to students- political representatives to vote for the election of Vice Chancellors.

Greece has one of the highest HE participation rates in Europe. According to the Ministry, 58 percent of those aged between 18 and 21 are registered in HE institutions (HRMNERA, 2003, p.2). At that time, there were 360,000 students registered – 200,000 in the AEI sector and another 160,000 in the TEIs (ibid).<sup>11</sup> Psacharopoulos and Tassoulas estimate that another 70,000 Greek students are studying abroad (2006, pp.249), mainly in the EU.

For the UK higher education sector, Greece tops the list of EU sending countries (ahead of Ireland and Germany). Historically large numbers of undergraduate students entered British universities, usually after completion of some preparatory training in so-called foundation colleges. With the increase in undergraduate places in Greece this flow has decreased significantly and most

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<sup>10</sup> The university continues to exist under the name National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and is commonly referred to as the University of Athens (University of Athens website, <http://uoa.gr/uoauk/uoaindex.htm>, accessed January 2008) It has a most prominent location in the centre of Athens and is still (partially) housed in the buildings designed by a Danish architect in 1841 (ibid).

<sup>11</sup> Comparison figures provided by UNESCO and the OECD vary according to their definitions although they are likely to be based on the original data provided by the ministry.

Greek students who come to the UK currently attend taught graduate programmes. In the academic year 2005/06 there were 17,675 Greek students participating in British Universities. This statistic represents a 10 percent drop on the figures from the previous year (UKCISA, The Council for International Student Affairs, [http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/about/statistics\\_he.php#table1](http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/about/statistics_he.php#table1)). This decline is associated with the increasing provision of taught graduate programmes in Greece itself.

Explanation of themes: Some of the themes outlined below are derived from the particular social, political and educational context in each of the three countries – these are not necessarily comparable – but are considered relevant in order to understand actual educational practices at undergraduate level (rather than formal structures). For the purposes of this project our considerations include curricular, extra-curricular and non-curricular aspects as well as the wider historical and political context.

Other themes derive from the particular research focus of the Student Diversity and Academic Writing (SDAW) Project, i.e. academic writing, information literacy and academic misconduct. These are explicitly dealt with across the three countries visited. The following list provides an overview of the themes covered by this report on undergraduate studies in Greece:

- Pan-Hellenic exams and the legacy of *frontistirio*
- Students' university life
- Teaching issues: perceptions of distance & fairness
- Politics, policies and participation
- Library use and information literacy
- Academic Writing within the curriculum
- Misconduct policies

### **3.2 Pan-Hellenic exams & the legacy of *frontistirio* (Φροντιστήριο)**

Whilst the formal criteria for accessing higher education in Greece were already outlined above (section 1) this section reports on the practices that accompany many students' progression from secondary school to undergraduate studies at university.

The Pan-Hellenic exams are a major event in Greece. Held annually in June they are accompanied by much public debate, commentary in the media and criticism from many factions. For whilst the Greek state endeavours to provide free education for all, it does not provide university places in sufficient numbers to meet demand.<sup>12</sup> Thus the university entrance exams are a high stakes event that facilitates (or limits) to each pupil important life options in terms of education and employment. A report on higher education reform by the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs characterises the situation thus:

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<sup>12</sup> The marks needed for entry into university are frequently reviewed by the government and each time there is criticism about the methods employed (personal communication, Maria Katsorchi, 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2008).

“The current imbalance between supply and demand with respect to places in the AEs and TEs is effectively one of the greatest problems facing not only the education system in Greece but also Greek society as a whole.” (Eurydice, 2000, Greece, p.269)

In order to do their best at the Pan-Hellenics, the majority of students receive additional private tuition paid for by their parents. In the mornings they attend mainstream (free) secondary school, in the evening pupils attend cramming classes – *frontistirio* – where the same material is reinforced. Despite the high cost per child, this kind of supplementary tuition is extremely widespread in Greece. Katsilis & Rubinson observed as far back as 1990 that “almost everyone intending to go to college enrolls in some form of private tutorial school for one or more semesters.” (Katsilis & Rubinson, 1990, p.277, footnote 12).

Based on a more recent study conducted in 2000, Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantiou report that more than eighty percent of students who took the university entrance exam in 1999 had attended some form of *frontistirio* (2005). In that year, there were nearly 180,000 exam takers for only 35,000 university places (plus the additional 34,000 places at the less popular technical education institutes). They also point out that as many as a third of exam takers were made up of those who had failed or done badly in previous years and were hoping to improve on past performance. After all this considerable expense, effort and worry, Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantiou note that ultimately “[a]mong those who entered university in our sample, only one out of three entered the department or university of their first choice.” (2005, p.104). However, recent reforms in education have meant that first students are examined in more subjects, around seven instead of four, and further, rather than just resitting one just the subject they would like a higher mark, and thus keeping their marks in the other three subjects as had traditionally happened, they are now required to resit all seven exams making this a less popular strategy among students.

A host of scholars (Psacharopoulos & Tassoulas, 2004; Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantiou, 2005; Stamoulas, 2005; Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006) have observed that the extensive use of private tuition clearly contradicts the statement – proudly and repeatedly made by Greek politicians – that education in Greece is free for all. Rather than simply benefiting from the generous state provision, private households are forced to invest heavily in order to facilitate the participation of their children in higher education. Psacharopoulos & Tassoulas estimate that “... families in Greece spend on *frontistirio* more than the state on secondary education – 390 vs. 270 billion drs. per year, respectively.” (2004, p.247).<sup>13</sup> Clearly, income levels are closely associated with the great variety in the number of classes that students attend, the sizes of classes that they attend, and even if students attend at all. Stamoulas explains:

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<sup>13</sup> See Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantiou 2005 for specific calculations of the respective contributions as presented by education economists.

“The heavy financial contributions by families to fill in huge gaps in the state budget point to a lurking association between education and socio-economic status, and point to the domestic social reproduction system as a factor in the perpetuation of inequalities. Free access is also reduced to a catchy but empty political slogan, since a considerably proportion of candidates taking the Pan-Hellenic Examinations fail to gain entry to universities.” (Stamoulas, 2005, p.48).

Capitalising on the high importance of the Pan-Hellenic exams and the shortage of HE places – and the often insufficient preparation afforded by the secondary school system – are the many *frontistirio* outfits. Bray, an OECD expert on shadow education notes that within this sector, figures are hard to come by for many of those who tutor do so as an additional (oftentimes unreported) income (Bray, 2006). *Frontistirio* teachers may be highly qualified and experienced secondary school teachers supplementing their salary; others may be tertiary students who are passing on their experience of having only recently passed the exams themselves (Mihail & Karaliopoulou, 2005). Also, the shape of *frontistirio* varies: some students attend large classes, others smaller groups, others receive individual tuition and increasingly they do both. In Greece the *frontistirio* teachers even have their own association (<http://www.oefe.gr/>), which is further testament to the fact that the shadow education market is booming.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the practicalities, politics and costs associated with preparing for the Pan-Hellenic exams tend to be heavily scripted, requiring Greek students to restate the answers as closely as possible to the books they use to prepare for the exams. Or, as one interviewee put it: ‘originality is penalised’. Unless pupils are capable of reproducing their school books they stand little chance of a good grade. Effectively, this means that Greek pupils are required to learn the official texts by heart. Though not necessarily representative of Greece more broadly, on average, students in Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantiou’s sample attended *frontistirio* classes for 2.4 years (typically 12 hours a week) and took individual tutoring for eight hours per week over 1.8 years (2005, p.105). Even with this preparation, it took the average student 1.7 attempts to enter university (ibid.). Another outcome of this system – of testing and preparing in this manner – leaves generation after generation of Greek students both utterly exhausted and with phenomenal (and hard earned) memorisation skills. Or, as Jackson puts it: “A particular issue is the emphasis on rote memory in preparation for country-wide Pan-Hellenic Examinations at the expense of critical thinking and analytic skills.” (Jackson, 2006).

### **3.3 Students’ university life**

The first part of this section describes the state of higher education for many years up to 2007. However, as mentioned at the beginning of this report, the

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<sup>14</sup> For a journalistic treatment of these issues, see this recent article in Athens News: The private cost of public schools (2006), <http://www.athensnews.gr/paideia/1pai8.htm>

new educational law aims to change the nature of student life in Greek universities and it will be discussed further here.

Given the rigour of the Pan-Hellenic exams, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that once Greek students have entered university, the pursuit of education takes a backseat for many – at least initially. On the whole students will have moved through the various levels of the education system without pause or diversion. On beginning their first year at university, the vast majority of students are eighteen, nineteen or twenty (depending on how long it took them to gain admission). Commonly those studying in their home city will continue living at home with their parents for the duration of their studies, i.e. into their mid to late twenties.<sup>15</sup> With the Pan-Hellenic exams and entrance to university secured, student life takes on a slower pace with a much better work life balance when compared to the preceding school years.

Throughout their time at university the majority of students rely on the financial support of their parents. Mihail & Karaliopoulou report an employment rate of 32 percent among full-time students in their final year; based on a 2003 study conducted in Thessaloniki (2005). Of these students 22 percent were wage earners and the remaining 10 percent were self employed, most commonly as tutors.<sup>16</sup> They note: “Perhaps the most striking finding is that more than half of the respondents are totally inactive, meaning that neither do they search for a job nor intend to do so.” (2005). Whereas female students respondents reported that they thought there were no jobs available to them and that they worried about conflicts between work and studies. Male respondents “disagreed in principle with the idea of working while they are full-time students.” (ibid.)

Students’ undertake a combination of lectures and seminars. In the compulsory subjects lectures normally take place in large lecture theatres for hundreds of students, while seminars will be in groups of around twenty. Seminar attendance is compulsory in many schools. Seminar and smaller group teaching was more extensive in the physical and natural sciences than in the social sciences. At technological education institutes students have to complete projects – usually in groups –, perform laboratory work and might also undertake internships (Eurybase, 2004, section 6.12.1).<sup>17</sup> Student attendance of lectures at university is not compulsory and tends to fluctuate. By their own admission, many students will attend lectures and seminars at the beginning of the academic year so as to gain an idea of the course, how it is to be taught and the books / resources they will need. For the most part – if they find that the lecture provides limited added value to the materials provided – they stay away usually until shortly before the final exam; pursuing their own extracurricular agenda instead. Student political parties and friends from

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<sup>15</sup> Most urban students would not consider moving for their studies and the universities in the two largest cities are in particularly high demand. For those who have to accept a place elsewhere (on the islands or in peripheral locations) there is some state provision for a housing allowance. See Labrianidis (1995) for a discussion on the provincial universities.

<sup>16</sup> They cite comparable data from the UK where the employment rate ranges from 59% to 72% (according to a study by Curtis & Williams, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Mihail (2006) reports on a recently introduced internship programme at the University of Macedonia.

previous years are likely to help out by supplementing the set literature with additional notes (see below for more on the activities of student political parties). Individual homework assignments and coursework are relatively rare (see below). The majority of students are assessed by written exams.

This way of life – the relaxed approach to studying – has been possible due to a key feature of the Greek HE system. Until recently, students could be registered indefinitely. According to a study conducted in 1993/1994 more than half the students registered were dormant, i.e. not studying for exams (Protopapas, 1999). Moreover, if students failed a course, they could take it again and again and again until they pass it. The high number of re-takes in the Greek higher education system is due to the large number of exams Greek students have to take. Instead of the 12-16 exams that students take as part of a typical British undergraduate degree in the social sciences, Greek students have to take well over forty or fifty exams, which in part accounts for the availability of re-take options. There used to be no limit to the number of re-takes. (but see update below on recent higher education reform efforts by the Greek government)

During fieldwork, we learned that it was not only leisurely students who were taking advantage of the flexible study arrangements in Greece. Career-conscious students sought to employ the voluntary fail method. In Greek universities marks generally range between zero and ten, with ten being the highest grade and five representing the pass mark. Students who were worried about their average grade might add to their exam script a note indicating that they would rather fail than accept a mark lower than seven or eight. When marking, lecturers could ignore or heed the students' request. Apparently it was fairly common for lecturers to tolerate their students' wishes, thus further swelling the numbers of those continually re-taking exams. For several years preceding 2007 the government had limited the maximum registration period for a Greek undergraduate degree to twelve years. Following the reforms in 2007, most courses are intended to be four years in duration (other than medicine etc) and thus they have a maximum of eight years for completion. This is a major change and there will be no longer the possibility to keep resitting or adopting a strategy of a voluntary fail (if the academic permitted this).

Some of the main components of the new law that governs universities from in 2007 are listed below. Paragraph 14 of this law stipulates:

1. Students will be allowed to be registered as students for double the amount of minimum semester number plus 2 semesters.
2. Students can postpone or interrupt their studies during this period. They have to ask permission in writing and they are not officially registered as students.
3. If students will not finish their studies in the above time they will not be registered any more.

4. Those who are already in university when this law will be put in practice will have 5 years to complete their studies. Those who have already exceeded the limit, they have to put in writing that they would like to continue being students.
5. Those students who start their degrees at the time the law will be put into practice, they will not be allowed to attend lectures of subjects if they have not passed exams of subjects from previous years that are related to their understanding.
6. If a student fails to pass an exam she/he has the right for one resit.
7. If a student fails again he/she has to take the exam after an approval from a three member committee.
8. If a student continues to fail an exam they can remain register but he/she will not be able to proceed in his/her studies.

The same law also stipulates:

- The election of Vice Chancellor directly from the majority of the students rather than the students' political representatives.
- The right of Greek universities to teach at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as well as PhD level in a foreign language. This has already come into effect with the newly created International University near Thessaloniki.

### **3.4 Teaching issues: perceptions of distance & fairness**

Student progression has been a major concern for Greek universities for some time and most institutions are crippled by the rapid and ongoing increase in student numbers. Firstly, there are the many students who simply won't pass through the system (as outlined in the discussion of retakes and support above). Secondly, the ministry keeps adding university places apparently 'in consultation' with the relevant departments. However, the process seems more closely allied to party political objectives rather than to careful and mutually considerate HE planning. Moreover, the consultative process was not mentioned in any of the interviews with Greek academics; they reported feeling squeezed instead.

Here is one illustrative quote from an interview with a senior academic:

"Actually we started with 60 students. But then the number of students that we take is decided by the Ministry of Education. So every year they ask, "How many students do you want?" And we say 60, for instance, or 40, or whatever we say, and they send us 150."

Most tellingly, the regular increases in study places are rarely accompanied by increased resources. Together these aspects have had a disastrous impact on staff-student ratios. The following statistics are indicative of these developments.

During the five years between the academic years 1996/97 and 2001/02 undergraduate numbers were increased by over a third within the technical education institutes (from 101,206 to 165,928). During the same period, staff numbers went up by 404 posts (Eurydice, 2003, p.35).<sup>18</sup> Greek HE staff are clearly in a difficult situation. At the same time, it must be noted that the size and organisational makeup of institutions varies greatly and hence the outcome of ministerial edicts is likely to affect the various organisations differently.<sup>19</sup> However, funding for Greek HE has dramatically decreased since the 1980s (Pesmazoglou, 1987 quoted in Prokou, 2003, p.305). Public expenditure for education – with only 3.8 percent of GDP – is now considerably lower than the EU average of 5 percent (Stamoulas, 2005, p.42). This funding crisis clearly concerns institutions across the sector, as does the relative lack of autonomy of individual institutions to deal with the situation (see policy section below).

The academic department is the basic organisational unit. It is at this level that educational programmes are planned, implemented, taught and evaluated and that diplomas are awarded. In terms of all educational matters, lecturing staff are remarkably free to decide on how they teach and assess their students. Similar to the American system, the person teaching the course is also responsible for the grading of exams. In our interviews we asked about external examining and this did not appear to be widely practiced in Greece. Bourantas, et. al. state in an OECD report that “[i]n sum, no formal internal or external evaluation of university education exists in Greece.” (Bourantas, D., Lioukas, S. and V. Papadakis, 2001, p.4).<sup>20</sup> Double marking is left up to individual departments and is quite rare, according to our fieldwork. Where it does happen it is an informal arrangement between colleagues.

According to one lecturer:

“I think that there are two groups, the older generation, and the younger generation. The younger generation tends to be more creative, so they tend to give a lot of essays. When they teach information systems they try to be even more creative in the way that they assess the students. The older generation is much more traditional, so it is mainly that they are mainly focused on exams, mid-term exams and then final exams.”

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<sup>18</sup> Within the university (AEI) sector the number of undergraduate students went up by almost 23,000 students. Meanwhile staff numbers increased by 89 (Eurydice, 2003, p.38). The official statistics provided by Eurybase separate out staff into various different categories but without providing explanations on who is included in each of these (also, those for the TEI and AEI sector differ). The figures provided below were added together by myself and include administrative and technical staff.

<sup>19</sup> For example, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki is the largest HE institution in Greece and currently has over 95,000 students (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, [http://www.auth.gr/home/index\\_en.html](http://www.auth.gr/home/index_en.html), accessed January 2008). Other institutions are tiny in comparison, e.g. the University of the Aegean, whose various departments are distributed across the different islands and the specialised Athens University of Economics and Business, which has only 6,000 students.

<sup>20</sup> As will be explored below in more detail, Greece is one of the last European countries to adopt a national system for quality assurance in higher education (HRMNERA, 2003, p.5).

In terms of teaching methods, many academic staff members told us that given their responsibility for the large core courses with several hundred students they felt they had little option but to provide a straight forward lecture format. In terms of assessment, several lecturers in business and management studies regretfully explained that they were using multiple choice tests in the larger (especially early years) courses. Assessment varied depending on the discipline, but students also reported writing short answers (lengths: five lines long, or half a page) to questions or short essays. Students were normally offered some student choice as to which question / topic they might answer.

Where lecturers saw the need and opportunity – for example in smaller elective courses – they might opt for projects and presentations, but these innovations take place at their own initiative and discretion. When we asked teaching staff about written assignments for students most said that it simply was very difficult to introduce much coursework, given their set up. One department in particular used a whole range of coursework assignments including literature reviews, essays, software design, team projects etc., and this accounted for up to 50% of students' marks. However, this appeared to be the exception, rather than the rule.

Here are two statements from Greek academics explaining the teaching and marking modus in Greek universities. Both are implicitly comparing the Greek context with their experiences in the UK:

"...in Greece, I mean instead of having 30 or 50 students we have 200 or 300, how you can deal with them? You don't know them in person, and you can't treat them in person because I mean that means that you have work, (laughs) 34 hours a day, I mean doing just tutorials, and there is no way I mean that you can do that (...)"

And here is a younger academic who had recently moved back to Greece:  
"I don't think that people in Greek universities tend to spend time in marking and seeing their students' projects, they don't spend much time on that. That's true, and that's very unfortunate for our universities. Maybe I shouldn't (laughs) say that, but this is the truth."

Based on our research it emerged that the majority of students are taught in lectures and examined through exams (mid-term and final). The proportion of marks between coursework and exams is so flexible that it is very hard to generalise, though it appears that in larger core courses exams are the main (and sometimes only) form of assessment.

During focus groups with undergraduates we specifically asked students whether they received feedback on the formative assignments, i.e. in those cases where they were expected to complete these. Few of them had received feedback other than by means of their final grades, which are released after the

exam period. Specifically on the issue of feedback, here are two excerpts from interviews with academics. The first statement is from a teaching fellow:

"[Students] don't get feedback, and this is the main problem. Most professors, what they do is that they, OK, they publish the marks over the Internet, or students just see their final mark at the end, but they don't get much feedback.

The second statement is from an established professor:

"If you have 300 or 400 students you cannot ask them to do anything, any course work, any projects or anything, because you would be submerged by all these things, you cannot mark them, correct them, you cannot see the students and consult them and advise them or anything. So you try to be just the professor who goes into the classroom, starts to say blah, blah, blah, departs as soon as you can."

As it turned out in the course of the interview this academic did get the students to do coursework:

"Actually (...) they are group are assessed,[through] group homework. (...) If you have 200 students, you cannot have everybody writing his own work. But if you have groups of eight people then it gets manageable." (...)

Interviewer: "So when they hand that in, do they get feedback from you?"

Academic: "Now this is a weak point. They usually don't get feedback because they are allowed to submit the work very late after – because um in my case, I mean they have to bring the written part of it the day they take the exam."

In terms of their approach to teaching and learning, newer departments (and / or newer institutions) appeared to operate arrangements similar to those used in the UK. For example, in terms of the role that research played in teaching (e.g. use of journals for teaching) and in the way in which students were (sometimes) being deliberately supported and trained for the work that they were expected to complete. This might in part be due to the fact that a younger – often foreign-educated – generation had been in charge of setting up these units collectively. However, as their initial appointment to the newer institutions was decided upon by a committee consisting of 2/3 from internal staff and 1/3 from external academics, the degree of independence was limited. This is a change introduced by the 2007 law.' This change' as one of the official explained 'was introduced mainly for the medical schools. We found out that 40% of the academics in medicine were related: they are parents and children, brothers and sisters, best men etc. They just vote for each other when a vacancy or promotion opportunity appears!' This impression – that newer courses and programmes were more closely allied with pedagogic considerations, rather than primarily driven by subject contents – seemed to be supported by the enthusiasm that many academics had for their postgraduate programmes. Graduate education is a relatively new endeavour in Greece. It was introduced in the 1990s. Postgraduate courses are much smaller, students are selected by the departments and pay fees. And several academics noted that students' attitudes were very different.

In more established units younger academics explained that they had to 'fit in' with the status quo in Greece. We were also told that younger academic staff were bearing the brunt of the teaching load. Here is a comment from one Greek academic who worked in a smaller newer university:

"...it is still this ivory tower (laughs) of the professors [they] live in their ivory towers, and they have a lot of power over (...) the lecturers and the senior lecturers. And they control the place, some of them, especially the traditional, the more traditional universities in Athens or in Thessaloniki, they control the place. And they don't let you be creative, and they don't let you develop your own initiatives."

According to our research in Greece academic staff are recruited on the basis of their academic qualification, research and publication alone. As in the UK, there is no compulsory pedagogic training provision for new lecturers. Further, unlike in the UK, it is relatively rare for Greek academic staff to move university at any time during their career from the one that they are appointed to initially. This feature of Greek higher education leads to staff highly encultured in the ways of doing things within a particular institution. It is also implicated in the highly political nature of Greek Higher Education institutions.

As was highlighted earlier when outlining the key components of the new law, up to 2007 the student representatives of the political parties which are about the 5-10% of the student population, used to vote for the election of Vice Chancellor. This gave them great power to manipulate their votes and make requests to the various candidates. Many had expressed their disbelief that this minority of students were making such important decisions. As one of the consultants for the new law explained: 'This 5-10% of students is the 'dynasty of absents' who never attend any lectures and they do not even deserve to be called students. They just have political ambitions themselves or are after an easy life.' The 2007 law has changed this. The Vice Chancellor is to be elected directly by the majority of students and not by their representatives. Students involved in political parties have reacted negatively to this. In early 2008, there was an election at Panteio Panepistimio for a Vice Chancellor and the student reps stole the ballot box and burnt the student ballots! As an official explained: 'This is their definition of democracy and the abuse of universities as asylums'. As in the UK, PhD students also assist Greek academics with the invigilation of exams and with the marking of assignments and exams. Sometimes, an academic may have a group of undergraduate and graduate students with who cooperate with them on projects. As part of such a group, these students receive unprecedented access to relevant training and often produce very high level work. Other students did not have such access to their professors, especially those who were studying on large and popular courses. Some students voiced their frustration at being unable to access their lecturers and some were under the impression that their lecturers were not always committed to their students' education.

Also, some students did not feel that they were being treated fairly, for example in terms of the marking of their scripts.

There were two sets of circumstances that came up in this context:

- One group of students explained to us in the focus group the ‘evidence’ for this alleged unfairness. They were cheating and they knew that their answers had been identical. Their marks, however, were not. Some had passed whilst others would have to have yet another go. One student explained that he had tried everything: serious study, cramming, no study at all, cheating with a crib, copying from friends and could discern no pattern as to what might make it more likely for him to pass. To him exam success was a lottery.
- Repeatedly we were told by students (successive generations of one particular institution) that a small number of students – political activists and prominent members of one of the main parties – were exempt from the usual exams and marking, or that they had been advantaged by gaining access to the answers in advance. The students insisted that this was not a large scale occurrence, but it was a well known fact and it offended them; they believe it wasn’t right.

Some students even fell back on the *frontistirio* (private tuition) option, which most unusually exists even at tertiary level in Greece. The calling cards offering this service were ubiquitous around the larger campuses and *frontistirio* companies took up prominently advertised office space nearby. Once again, students were paying for their education that was supposedly provided for free. When we asked students about this, they responded cynically that *frontistirio* was considered as a last resort. However it was nowhere near as extensive in higher education as it was with regard to the pan Hellenic exams.

Here is an excerpt from the interviews with Greek university staff:

“... I don’t know what is their idea and their impression about professors. Probably (...) because the system here was quite hierarchical and there was very, you know, structural distance between the students. (...) they fear that if they say something they might not pass the exams, and they think that you have the power not to let them get their degree, which might be true in some cases, but it is just the exception.”

In the interviews several university lecturers were complaining about students cheating and noted that this did compromise the examining system at times. Staff explained that they personally felt quite powerless to address this state of affairs (see also section 3.8 on academic misconduct below). As in the UK, Invigilators may be not only academics but also support staff or PhD students who may (at times) lack the necessary authority and / or back up when they detect and query misconduct.

It is important to note that academic staff can hold more than one post – many combine their work at the university with other public and private sector

commitments.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, sitting on external government committees, professional associations advising on projects and undertaking consulting work is a central part of academic credibility. According to some academics we spoke to, the prestige from working externally is just as important in Greece as research publications. Further, where such activities lead to payment, this supplemented the relatively low salaries among Greek academics.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from becoming involved in business, politics was another important area of engagement for many Greek academics. The roles they took in the political realm varied: these emerged either as part of their affiliation with the university, or due to their membership in a particular party and its changing role in local and or national politics. The connection between politics and academia in Greece is further outlined in the following section.

### **3.5 Policies, politics and participation**

This section examines the political nature of higher education Greece, which is perhaps more heightened and explicit than in many other countries. The funding crisis (mentioned above) is clearly forcing very difficult decisions about allocations and priorities. Other aspects too come into play, i.e. the vagaries of national educational policy, university governance and intra-organisational politics are elaborated below.

Much has been written about the international influences on Greece's national educational policy (Prokou, 2003; Georgiadis, 2005; Gouvias, 2006; Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006). The influence of EU policies (and structural funds) – since Greece joined in 1981 – has been fairly well documented. Gefou Madianou suggests that “two interconnected but contradictory tendencies informed the admission of Greece into the European Union. On the one hand, it had naturally boosted the expectations of many among the intelligentsia for modernization in accordance with Western European standards. Only in such a climate, it was held, could the social sciences flourish, (...). On the other hand, the European orientation of Greece, and to an extent, its position as a fund-receiving country of the South, made the newly acquired reflexive gaze of the social sciences more vulnerable to the shift in emphasis towards a more economical approach to social services and public institutions. The turn towards ‘audit culture’ reintroduced a certain version of positivism which this time was not so much political but economic and bureaucratic.” (2000, pp.266).

Meanwhile, the development of the higher technical education sector appears to have been stimulated in large part by suggestions of the OECD back in the sixties. More recent developments in the TEI sector are very much due to vested national political interests: it emerged as the silver bullet to the huge public demand for HE in Greece. The then government responded to the crisis

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<sup>22</sup> In 2007 a tenured Greek associate professor is likely to earn between 1500 – 1800 Euro per month.

by simply upgrading the shorter cycle non-university programmes into HE proper (Psacharopoulos & Tassoulas, 2005, p.248). Thus, between 1995 and 2001 HE entry places increased overall by 75 percent. Notably, the TEI sector bore the brunt of the increase – within it, places increased by an enormous 91 percent. Clearly cost considerations were a major factor behind the decision, which was achieved without an increase to the HE budget: each university place costs 4,250 Euro a year, the cost for a TEI place is only 1,500 Euro (ibid.).<sup>23</sup>

When considering Greek HE policy, another important contextualising factor arises: unemployment. One of the reasons why it takes many students so long to progress through university is presumably related to the fact that what comes after graduation is far from certain. Greece has a high unemployment rate in comparison with other European countries anyhow, but what is particularly noteworthy is youth unemployment. The rate for those under the age of 24 amounts to 20 percent and hence compares badly with the overall unemployment rate of 9,6 percent (Giamouridis & Bagley, 2006, p.4 quoting the Economist, 2002). Other relevant contextual issues are the high importance of the public sector as an employer (much larger than in other EU countries) and the particular nature of recruitment. Giamouridis & Bagley note the informality of the Greek labour market and that job hunting is a long, expensive and time consuming process (ibid., p.10).

Mihail & Karaliopoulou report that as many as 60 percent of their sample of student jobseekers were relying on 'traditional' means to procure work, i.e. their families and friends (2005). Rather than being lazy and unfocused, students are perhaps postponing the inevitable, i.e. a difficult labour market situation. This is particularly pertinent, given that "[u]ntil recently, the majority of university degrees secured the graduate a position or the promise of a position in the future within the Greek civil service. This created the expectation that in obtaining a university degree the young person's economic survival was ensured." (Gefou-Madianou, 2000, pp.273, footnote 8)

These external aspects clearly affect the running of HE institutions and they probably don't make it any easier for HE administrators and managers. In Greece, individual institutions are further encumbered by a highly centralised education system, where the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs (MNERA) is responsible not only for policy, but also for the organisation and administration of higher education. Historically, this makes a lot of sense: Greek higher education had originally developed along the lines of the German-Humboldtian model when professors wielded extraordinary powers (Eurydice, 2000, p. 267).

Gefou-Madianou writes of the 1982 Reformatory Law: "The most important changes that this law introduced were the abolition of the all-powerful chair and

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<sup>23</sup> Giamouridis & Bagley note: "The TEIs resemble in many of their aspects the British Polytechnics. Thus, even though the degrees they provide are now recognised by the Greek state as equal to university degrees, they are not recognized as such by either the market or the students and their parents." (2006, p16, footnote 10).

the nineteenth-century concept of school assemblies, that is, of individual chairs. In their place, it introduced a more democratic structure, so that the teaching staff of the department were responsible for administrative and curriculum decisions. This was implemented by instituting departments and sections, which corresponded to separate disciplines." (Gefou-Madianou, 2000, p.258). Professorial appointments – these days – are made through committees. Senior managers of HE institutions are being elected through special bodies that used to include a high number of student representatives. However, as explained earlier this has been changed with the implementation of 2007 law, which continues to experience significant resistance from existing student representatives and the left wing political parties in Greece. In the twenty-first century however, many commentators (see especially the OECD evaluation produced by Bourantas et al. 2001; Kaplanis & Nanoussi, 2001) bemoan the lack of autonomy of individual institutions. Bourantas et al. characterise the current situation thus:

"Since the State controls university funding and the flow of funds from the EU to the universities, all specific budget categories must be determined in the state budget. It follows that the state exercises very tight control over such strategic issues as establishing or abolishing faculties and departments, and post-graduate programmes, internal organisational structures for support services and the role, responsibility and functioning of governing bodies and their election. MNERA determines human resource issues, including all human resource policies and management systems, the number of staff posts allocated to individual universities and departments and recruitment regulations, faculty remuneration, staff appointment, promotion, social security, pension etc. University procurement is entirely subject to the law on public procurement. Any payment requires approval by a designated Public Auditor in the Ministry of Finance. Other expenditures are also subject to state financial controls." (Bourantas et al., 2001, p.1).

One way in which this complicated relationship with the state is played out is university funding. Currently, there is no clear allocation procedure in place (Stamoulas, 2005). Or rather, what is currently in use is an 'input-based' state funding system (HMNERA, 2003, p.7). During fieldwork we were told that the different universities have to rely on what is effectively lobbying to fund recurrent costs and future developments. Oftentimes this is done through well established party lines. This process is sometimes helped by an ongoing transfer of personnel: academics have been known to enter politics on a local and national level. But it also works the other way around: during fieldwork we were told that because university administrators are recruited through committees, national political parties can have a huge influence through a block vote that brings together votes of staff unions and student wings. In turn this means that by the time a new person is in post they are heavily indebted to different factions and interests within the organisation. This state of affairs rather limits their options when it comes to institutional reform.

Historically, international and national policy priorities appear to effectively clash over the area of Quality Assurance within the Greek HE sector. Greece is one of the last EU countries to introduce a body charged with evaluating HE institutions. Quality Assurance is a key aspect of the Bologna Process that seeks to 'foster a coherent, compatible and competitive European higher education' area by means of similar degree structures (two main cycles), the establishment of a comparable system of credits, the promotion of mobility and ultimately, the mutual recognition of degrees. In Greece the introduction of an evaluation mechanism that facilitates these processes has met with opposition from all sides. Stamoulas explains:

"The professional status of Greek professors (...) has undermined the importance of research performance and productivity as criteria of job security and advancement (...). The implementation of an appraisal system would publicly uncover Greek academics' slow research pace compared to their foreign colleagues (...) and would, if linked to job security, endanger many a career. The truth is that significant responsibility for this situation rests in the inexistence of state policies and incentive schemes (...). On the other hand, the state has been reluctant to overcome university trade union pressures against the adoption of evaluation methods, presumably because the results of evaluation would illustrate public under-investment in higher education and, implicitly, the state's incapacity to assume its constitutional responsibilities." (Stamoulas, 2005, pp.47)

Finally, a further factor in the everyday functioning of universities – and in the lives of many Greek students – are the student unions. During fieldwork student unions popped in a range of unexpected everyday contexts: student political parties provided basic administrative information to students (time tables, course outlines and addresses), presumably because they could do so more efficiently than the institution itself. In addition they also handed out booklets with past exam papers – thus providing basic teaching and learning support to the students. But this rather downplays the role of student political parties. As was already mentioned, students are involved in all aspects of university management. According to the ministry,

"The higher education system in Greece is considered as one of the most participatory systems in Europe, especially as regards student participation. Students in the Greek Universities participate at a percentage which varies between 35% and 40% in the Senates of the Universities, and reaches almost 30% in the Assemblies of the Faculties, while it exceeds 40% in the bodies which elect the Rector and the Vice Rectors of the University and the Head of each Faculty. (...) The Greek Government has a constant policy as regards the students, considering them as full partners in higher education governance. (HMNERA, 2003, p.8).

During fieldwork there was no way that we could overlook the fact that student elections were on. University buildings were shrouded in banners on the outside and posters covered every available wall space. In one institution the interior

was dominated by the large stands set up by opposing parties. Each party used a sound system and every two minutes they would competitively turn in up a notch – blasting popular music. Teaching (and learning) in that context was not possible, or at least not in the adjacent lecture theatres. As impressive and noisy a demonstration of political presence and power as this was – many students warned us not to overestimate its relevance to university life. Party politics were highly relevant to those who were preparing for a career in that realm; to the majority it was a bit of fun, or even simply insignificant. In any case, the political dimension of student life is increasingly in competition with market forces: similarly sized and prominently displayed posters were advertising cheap student holidays on the Greek islands.

### **3.6 Textbooks and library use**

As outlined above, all HE students in Greek public sector universities receive free textbooks and study materials for their courses. The official materials need to be in Greek (although additional materials in English may be permitted); they are handed out at the beginning of the semester. As part of their tenure agreement, Greek academics are required to write their own textbooks for the course and level at which they teach. This is in part a way to allow for a continual replenishing of up-to-date Greek language study resources. Further, it is a way to ensure that those who do not speak English as a second or thirds language are not disadvantaged. This is a significant number of the undergraduate population. Once completed, books are submitted to the ministry for approval by a panel of Greek subject specialists. Additional materials may consist of lecture slides and / or copies of academic journal articles, but in most courses it is the textbook that most closely reflects the core concerns and contents of the course and the position of the lecturer. This emphasis on Greek language resources means that there are not an extensive number of up to date sources available for students to find in the libraries or book shops.

In private sector universities, the language of instruction was often English, and as such they were not restricted to Greek only sources, and thus were able to review a much broader range of academic sources. Of course with the new law, and already the creation of an International University that teaches in English, we should expect this to change.

Given students' excellent memorisation skills – acquired during secondary school and honed during the preparation for the Pan-Hellenic exams – preparation by cramming is a relatively common practice for university level examinations. As one university professor explains:

“... the students are not happy at all with [us] giving them literature or a bibliography. They are not happy because they – of course they are not happy, because they want the simple thing, which is a text book, get this book, I mean it's 150/200/300 pages, you will read it from back to back, and that's it. (...) instead of having to read an indefinite number of papers, just the topic, I mean

instead of having just the topic and then you have to face the library and what's in it. I mean they don't like the other idea, because that's the easy way to go about it. So from the one hand I mean it's again something that's very difficult to change."

With the focus directed towards the textbook in public universities, Greek students have relatively little cause to visit the library. In fact, during our visits, we found most of the university libraries rather small and rather empty, especially given the large number of students.

In one focus group students in their final year explained that they hadn't personally been to the library, they didn't even know where it was; it hadn't come up with any urgency – going to the library wasn't a necessity.

Staff members tended to agree – because of the use of textbooks – students were not expected or 'made to' engage with the library. Some staff members complained that the libraries were not well stocked. This in part is due to the reliance on providing study material in Greek. However, some noted that with recent influx of EU money dedicated to the establishment of graduate courses, things had improved.

Given the centrality of Greek language textbooks and the sometimes large class sizes in public universities, this provided an additional income for Greek academics. Indeed, sometimes, professional academic publishers would not be chosen so as to reduce the production costs. Further, some of the textbooks were said to be translations of seminal English language texts, sometimes without attribution.

Some lecturers will provide students with additional notes and or slides, but this is not something that students would take for granted. Also, practices vary in terms of whether students are charged for this or notes are provided for free.

For students at public universities the textbook 'culture' and the emphasis on memorisation form an important legacy. Whilst studying at undergraduate level in some Greek programmes, many students are neither required to pick up and demonstrate research skills, nor are they required to read widely. As noted earlier, this in part is due to the high number of examinations that students are required to undertake, and thus the targeted reading that this necessitates. Importantly, those studying at private universities had far more opportunities to read widely.

### **3.7 Academic writing**

As part of the project we were particularly keen to develop an understanding of the quantity and the type of writing that students had done before they might come to join taught graduate programmes in the UK. In the case of Greece, academic writing practices are particularly difficult to generalise. Due to the

enormous freedom that departments and lecturers have, it cannot be stated for certain that all Greek graduates have undertaken individual written assignments. Having said that, at most universities there is the provision – and sometimes expectation – for students to complete a final undergraduate thesis. However, this does not necessarily apply in the private sector and practices vary also in established universities and between departments. Some private sector university such as the American College mirror approaches to academic writing undertaken in the USA for example. Thus such Greek undergraduate students may have extensive experience of a broad range of academic writing practices, and as their language of instruction is in English, are familiar with reading widely etc.

According to the regulations for the technical education sector (TEI), a graduation project is mandatory and “is assessed first by the supervising faculty member and then presented in public before a three-member committee of faculty members which awards the final mark.” (Eurybase, 2004, section 6.13.1). The regulations do not state the value accorded to the written as opposed to the oral component.

Within the main higher education sector (AEI), arrangements are more flexible. The length and format of theses may vary (though several thousand words appear to be the norm where these are completed). It may be based on library research or on a project conducted by individuals or in a team of students. At least one senior academic at one of the most renowned universities told us that whilst there was a provision for students to complete an undergraduate dissertation in theory; in practice students were strongly discouraged because the supervision and marking of their projects created so much extra work for staff.

From the focus groups with students we know that some students had undertaken the writing of their thesis ‘cold’, which is to say without much practice, training and instruction in information literacy, academic writing and referencing. Whatever guidance they might have had depended not only on the department, but on their supervisor (and/or the research team with which they worked – if indeed, they did).

To some of the lecturers we met it was very important that the thesis was executed to a high standard and that it contained a well developed argument, was based on appropriate and wide reading and fully referenced. But this did not apply to all staff. This is the explanation of one Greek professor who we asked about academic writing in Greek universities:

“...in some departments (...) they are writing papers, I mean they are writing theses and these sort of things but - I am doing it quite a lot in my courses – but it is very difficult, it’s very hard, it’s very hard. And people, I mean because of the whole education system in Greece, I mean people are not trained to write papers, I mean that’s one of the main problems that we have. I mean they are trained to memorise, I mean that’s how they enter the Greek

university. In order to enter the Greek university, basically I mean you have to memorise things, which is not the best thing..."

In the interviews with staff – when we asked about training provision in information literacy and referencing – we were told that this was mainly done if and when individual teachers (or in some cases, teaching assistants) felt strongly about it; in most universities that we visited it did not form part of the curriculum. Also, there seemed to be no particular quantity or type of references that students would be expected to have consulted. Depending on the subject it might have been more acceptable to focus on internet sources and business reports, rather than academic journals. Several students said that it was up to them; their lecturers had not specified what was expected.

During fieldwork it emerged that two of the less well respected institutions within the Greek HE environment emerged as the ones that were systematically supporting their students in their academic writing:

- One peripheral state institution ran a course on writing as part of their first year. The university was relatively new and quite small and staffed mainly by new academics who had qualified overseas. They explained that they were not among the most popular institutions, hence student numbers were lower and they could manage to offer this course.
- As already noted, some of the private institutions follow the American undergraduate curriculum – and teach in English – and as it turned out, their students were required to take two academic writing courses as part of the first two years of their studies.

Among Greek students, academic writing skills cannot be taken for granted. Some may have completed some first rate research and writing, while others might have copied part of their project and / or translated much of it from elsewhere (either with or without acknowledgement of the relevant sources).

### **3.8 Academic misconduct**

In most interviews with Greek lecturing staff academic misconduct was mentioned by them before we could bring it up ourselves. Several academics told us that cheating in exams was both endemic and casual, though they hastened to add that not all students succumbed to the temptation. As outlined earlier, exams are oftentimes invigilated by non-academic staff that have little authority to address the situation there and then.

Our interviews revealed that even established academics were facing a difficult situation when they wanted to intervene. Here are some of the examples Greek academics gave us:

- One lecturer explained how he had challenged a student – but the student had simply run off. He himself had been a teaching assistant at the time and felt that there was little he could do – he had a whole room to supervise and he had no idea how to identify that student.

- One senior academic told us how she had been so incensed by a students' blatant cheating that she decided to take it forward to the senate. Much internal political wrangling ensued and whilst a panel agreed with her demand to suspend the student for two semesters, this period was later shortened and ultimately, it had made no difference to the student's progress. Apparently, the student simply retook the exam and that was that.

In Greece, cheating in exams is clearly defined as misconduct, but in practice it does happen – according to students interviewed quite regularly – and usually students' conduct is not met with any serious penalties.

One Greek academic talked about cheating in the context of her son's experiences:

"My son is a student in a Greek university, and a year ago, or last term, I can't remember, he sat for an exam. The academic wasn't there, or he came there and he stayed for a few minutes, and then he said, he asked the clerk, I mean the porter, the porter not the secretary or someone, to be the only vigilant in the thing. So the porter is a guy who is not educated etc., so he thinks that it's (..) to tell the students, "Don't care, do whatever you want." And they started cheating. And I remember him, I mean and a friend of his, they came to the house and they were really, don't know, not furious, I mean they were feeling that they had been betrayed."

We also asked staff about university policies specifically addressing plagiarism, but there are apparently none. Indeed, one new academic told us how their attempts to address student plagiarism were met with utter disinterest by senior staff.

Below we report the experience of a well established senior academic in one of the interviews:

"I don't know, we don't have the skills I mean to do that, I mean we don't have the search engines to do that. But I can understand, I mean the text, whether it's a text written by the student or it's a text taken from other places. I mean I'm not – I am marking it, and I am saying that this might be something that you've taken out from somewhere which I can't trace, but I mean I'm asking. And I'm trying to say right from the beginning when we start discussing about writing papers and these sorts of things, that this is something that they have to – they must make sure that they are not going to do it. I mean there is no point in doing that..."

Interviewer : There isn't a policy?

"No, no I mean the general policy on how to treat that, no, no. Of course I mean it's something that is not tolerated. But I mean it doesn't necessarily mean that you are going to fail him. It very much depends on the academic."

In terms of misconduct it seems the worst that can possibly happen to a Greek student is that he or she will have re-sit the exam at a later date. There are no rules that allow for the student to be expelled. Plagiarism is apparently even less of an offence – we found no policies or penalties in place in any of the institutions we visited.

## **4. Conclusions**

The aim of this report is to supply background information on the educational practices at undergraduate level in Greece. The intended audience are staff in British universities who teach large numbers of students from Greece without necessarily appreciating what kinds of transitions these students will have to make in order to successfully complete their studies in the UK. The report is not intended as a judgment or commentary on the Greek higher education system and / or specific institutions. Rather, by means of the themes, it investigates various aspects of the education system *and* endeavours to outline the different types of logic by which the different participants in it operate. This conclusion revisits the context provided through the themes with particular reference to their implication for students that move into UK HE. The 2007 changes in the law governing the Greek higher education system should be kept in mind. Whilst it is not yet known what the consequences and repercussions of the ongoing reform efforts will be, as they will greatly influence prior educational experiences of students from Greece in future years.

Students who drink coffee are often described as 'lazy'. In the Greek context it is important to note those students are probably also learning from their peers about important aspects of what it means to be a student. This applies both to practical features such as expected requirements in each course, how to complete assignments and how to gain access to resources, etc. as well as to extra-curricular ones such as student union politics and employability issues (via networking). Greek HE institutions generally practice a hands-off approach toward their students; hence it is up to the students themselves to acquire the relevant information and to make things happen. In Greece drinking coffee with friends might just supply access to the kinds of information and training that simply isn't readily available elsewhere within the institution.

On coming to the UK students might not necessarily expect the level of support that is commonly available and that tends to be distributed across the institutions (which can make it harder for students to find and access). Old habits such as relying on networks and friendships as a way to gain important information and skills might backfire – especially if those friends are themselves not familiar with the UK requirements. Also, Greek students' prior educational experiences mean that they are unlikely to recognise a need for further external support. Given this background it is up to institutions to find ways of alerting students to the opportunities that library and study skills training units can provide – ideally at the point of need (rather than during the induction period, when it is not yet relevant to newly arrived students).

The prevalent emphasis on cramming and memorisation has an important legacy for the way in which many Greek students study. Students moving to the UK come equipped with memorisation skills that are generally extremely impressive. However, and specifically for those who come from public sector universities, once the connection to a single authoritative source is lost, these hard-won skills can also become cumbersome. Students may not appreciate the

implications of having to read larger numbers of sources (and differentiate between different types). Based on their undergraduate experiences in Greece, students can't be expected to know how to keep notes of contents and won't necessarily be familiar with citation conventions as operated in the UK. Without appropriate note taking, however, they are likely to be struggling with the notion of acknowledging the work of others. This is not to say that information literacy will be new to all Greek students – as previously mentioned – there will be a few who will have researched and written papers and projects at an advanced level. Unfortunately though, this is not the norm.

Based on our research it appears that in the Greek context student progression and academic conduct are much more casual and (to some extent, apparently) negotiable. Students might take for granted that this is what 'being at university' is like. They might need to be alerted to the specific regulations that apply at their new institution and / or course, including real life examples of the serious consequences that might ensue if they do not comply with these.

Finally, Greek students are often away from home for the first time and this can bring up any number of issues that typically in Britain are dealt with at undergraduate level. One well established and well respected agent told us that in her experience it would actually be kinder to lie to the new students at the beginning, especially in terms of attendance requirements. She thought that students did not generally appreciate the differences between the system back home and the system in the UK – often until it was too late for their first marked assignments. Once they understood what was expected, i.e. through regular attendance in the first month, they would settle down much more easily.

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