

Graduate Employment in the Greek Labour Market

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit had been given where reference has been made to the work of others

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Abstract

There is a widespread assumption across Europe that investment in education is of vital importance. According to many, it can enhance economic performance at an individual, organizational and societal level as well as achieve social cohesion.

This study examines the dynamics of graduate employment through a case study of Greece. Very little is known about career decision-making or progression for these graduates, or about the key factors which impact on their transitions and employability. The analysis investigates the career trajectories of Greek graduates from the disciplines of nursing and public administration & political science. Its empirical base draws from a graduate questionnaire survey, and semi-structured interviews with graduates, course directors, HE careers advisers, and recruitment consultants.

By focusing on the career trajectories of graduates in one specific country (Greece), we develop a multi-level analysis of the dynamics of graduate employment. The analysis traces the historical evolution of the structure of higher education in Greece and assesses the subtle interactions between higher education structure and policies and labour market trends. The study reveals the way in which socio-economic factors impact upon students' degree choices and their career activities after graduation. These factors help identify how far students have clear career trajectories in mind when they decide upon where and what to study and their career expectations.

This study challenges the assumptions, so dominant in European educational policy discourse, about the supposed merits of expanding higher education.

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Introduction

One of the most debated issues within the European labour markets, especially during the last decade, has been the value of higher education. There is a common perception that higher education studies are strongly linked to employment. Individuals seek to enhance their future career, social status and economic returns through higher education; employers continue to recruit graduates within organizations in order to add value to their business; governments continue to invest in higher education in order to further promote social and economic prosperity. However, the linkage between higher education and employment has not been fully explored and established. Thus, it has been the subject of contest and debate for many key actors involved in this dynamic process. With the expansion of higher education does there remain an advantage for graduates in the labour market? Do graduates have the abilities and skills to perform effectively within the labour market? Is there an increasing need for graduate labour amongst employers? And, has the increased number of graduates promoted social and economic prosperity?

This study explores the position of higher education graduates within the Greek labour market. Its main aim is to investigate the extent to which graduates' expectations of the transition from education to employment and their career expectations, decisions and outcomes are shaped by a specific national environment, structure and culture. Of particular importance in Greece is the weak links between educational institutions and organisations operating in the economic field. This phenomenon is attributed to the gap between the increasing number of people entering higher education and the limited demand of the domestic economy for highly educated personnel. An analytical account is presented of the interplay of factors shaping graduate expansion. A unique aspect of the study lays in its attempt to directly examine graduates' perceptions of their studies and graduate career

trajectories through a country specific case. In this regard, the contribution of this study is to explore the linkages between higher education and employment and therefore, investigate the *actual* value of the degree studies within the Greek labour market.

The first chapter of this thesis presents an overview of the expansion of higher education in Europe and examines the position of graduates within the labour market. This includes an analysis of broader changes in occupational structure and skill levels, and the position of graduates within the labour market. It also provides an assessment of the relationship between higher education and employment from both the perspective of employers and graduates.

Chapter Two outlines the core conceptual and empirical concerns of the thesis by reviewing the importance of methodological considerations in shaping decisions over research strategy and method. It considers the scope of the study, relating this discussion to the relative merits of conducting a country level study and presents the research techniques adopted.

The next four chapters report the empirical findings of the study. Chapter Three situates the issue of graduate employment within the dynamics of a country's characteristics- in this case Greece. In this respect, it addresses developments of higher education in Greece historically and looks at the various social, political and institutional factors that impacted upon the formation of the current higher educational system. Specific consideration is given to the way that the Greek labour market is structured and how its characteristics shape graduate employment.

Chapter Four presents a quantitative analysis of a questionnaire survey of graduates from two different disciplines: nursing and PSc & PA. The survey examines graduates' progression within the labour market and then draws out the broader implications of the study. Some areas of consideration are the factors influencing early career decisions, the skills picked on during the two degrees and perceptions about these skills. Post degree decisions between graduates from different degree studies, gender and marital status are also examined.

Chapters Five and Six report the findings of the qualitative approach of the study. They seek to identify the extent to which pre and post degree decisions influence the career choices of graduates. Drawing from interview material, Chapter Five considers the perceptions and experiences of the sample of respondents graduating from political science- public administration and nursing. Its principal concern is to analyse graduates' views on the value of their degree in the labour market. The focal points are: the factors influencing their decision to study; decision making after completing their degree studies; value of their degree in the labour market; career progression and barriers to progression.

Chapter Six reports the findings of interviews with a number of recruitment consultants, academic professors and career advisors. It aims to explore in depth some of the issues raised in the graduate questionnaire in such a way as to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept of the higher education outcomes and graduate career trajectories, as well as the difficulties graduates encounter during this implementation process.

Finally, Chapter Seven identifies the significance and implications of the findings. The key findings of the empirical chapters are briefly summarised while the broader implications for

educational policy providers, employers as well as individuals making career choices are outlined. This chapter concludes with recommendations of potential areas for future research.

Our appendices includes a list of professions associated to higher education studies, a copy of the survey questionnaire, circulated to graduates of both disciplines, as well as the individual profiles of those graduates participating in the study.

Chapter One

Recent trends in the graduate labour market

1.1 Introduction to the key issues

The main focus of the thesis is the issue of graduate employment in the Greek labour market. In recent years, all European countries have seen a marked growth in the number of people entering tertiary education (Teichler *et al.*, 2002). Since the Lisbon summit (1996), European social and economic policy has been predicated upon the assumption that increased skills and educational levels hold the key to the success of Europe in global competition (Purcell *et al.*, 2003). This is not a new idea. Successive national governments since the late 1980s have developed policies designed to increase participation and widen access to higher education (HE), in the belief that the resulting increased output of graduates will bring economic and social prosperity both nationally and internationally (see for example DfEE, 1998). Concerns exist, however, within the Greek labour market, that there is a growing mismatch between the skills and knowledge that graduates develop during their academic studies and employers' skill requirements. Recent research conducted in the area of graduate employment (Purcell *et al.*, 2002) reveals that a significant proportion of graduates have trouble in accessing employment which makes full use of their potential, while some employers complain that they are unable to fill their graduate vacancies with candidates of the appropriate skills and qualifications needed to perform job requirements.

The scope of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework in which the main objectives of the thesis can be outlined and explored. In this regard, the focus of this chapter is to explore the expansion of HE in Europe historically and examine the various factors affecting the dynamics of graduate employment. First, an overview of the expansion of HE in Europe is outlined and then the impact of the European

initiatives upon the Greek educational structure and policies is explored. It also discusses the position of graduates within the labour market, including an analysis and assessment of the relationship between HE and employment from the perspectives of both employers and graduates.

1.2. The expansion of HE in Europe

HE policy has increasingly been the focus of interest and the subject of international comparison since the 1960s after which a noticeable expansion of the HE sector has occurred across most European countries. The expansion of HE has been reflected in an increase in both the number and diversity of HE institutions as well as in the number of applicants for places in HE. During the 1960s, it was argued that the expansion of HE might contribute significantly to economic growth as well as to the reduction of social inequality (Teichler *et al.*, 1997). According to the European Commission (2002), the increased demand for places in HE during the 1960s and 1970s was partly the result of an increase in the number of people with the requisite entry-level qualification for HE (Eurodyce, 2000). In most countries, expansion was greater during the 1980s, due to the enlargement of the European Community and the availability of European funding.

Since the 1980s, an increasing pressure on higher education has been the growing concern, within individual economies and within the European Union as a whole, about national economic regeneration and growth as well as international competitiveness. As the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC, 1990) of the European Commission argued:

‘the output of education and training systems (including, in particular, higher education – in terms of both quality and quantity of skills at all levels – is the prime determinant of a country’s level of industrial productivity and hence competitiveness’

(Harvey, 1999:4)

Closer international links between HE institutions in Europe have been developed as a result of the various Community programmes launched since 1987 to promote student mobility and partnerships between institutions, such as Erasmus, Lingua (now part of the Socrates programme) and through EU-funded research programmes. Although education policy is primarily the responsibility of individual Member States according to the Principle of subsidiarity, Article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty recognised for the first time the responsibility of the European Community to promote cooperation in education between European countries.

More specifically, efforts made by the Treaty of Amsterdam (Art. 149) for the encouragement of cooperation between Member states aimed to add a European dimension to education, to help develop quality education and encourage life-long learning. In 1999, Ministries from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration. The ultimate aim of the process is to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010 in which staff and students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications (Council of Europe: The Europe of cultural cooperation). Therefore, an immediate priority of the Bologna process was, first, the creation of networking structures and mechanisms between Professional HE Institutions, Universities and other HE institutions across Europe; and secondly, the further improvement and enlargement of cooperation among stakeholders, especially between students and businesses. Achieving this goal requires a well planned and well executed coordinated educational policy. Greece, for example, as a member of the EU,

is rapidly moving towards this goal. The Greek government sees the development of joint-degree programmes between Greek institutions and other European institutions as well as the recognition of academic qualifications as the most important factors contributing towards the development of the European Higher Education Area. However, several aspects of the existing educational policy of Greece reveal the problems associated with the recognition of the degree programmes in a European level. More specifically, according to the latest government report on implementing the proposals of the Bologna Declaration, the consensus in Greece on the existing degree structure is that:

‘the first degree studies should continue to be obtained in Greece after at least four years of studies, and any ideas for first-cycles degrees obtained after three years of studies are totally rejected. This is because, the requisite restructuring of the curricula will result in the restriction of the academically oriented courses and to the preservation of those courses which have a more or less direct relevance to employment needs ... leading to the ‘professionalisation’ and ‘de-academisation’ of the first-degree studies’.

A key element to the Bologna declaration is also the binary education system which describes the two tiered curriculum of the undergraduate and postgraduate education. According to this system, students can either go directly into employment after completion of their first-degree studies, or alternately continue their studies and achieve postgraduate qualifications such as masters and doctorate. Fundamental to this system is the exploration of the national labour markets, their structure, graduate prospects and skills in demand.

More specifically, the relationship between education and graduate employment has been a crucial issue in the European literature over the last decade (for a comparative review see Teichler *et al.*, 1997). There is a widespread assumption that the broad aim

of HE – as part of the broader employability strategy– is to be a responsive provider of education in areas of skill shortages (Harvey, 1999). However this assumption is problematic, as it does not take into consideration the peculiar characteristics of different national environments, EU policies and labour market structures. Until recently, policies governing general access to HE or access to specific fields of study were mainly the result of the demand for HE graduates by the national economy, student demand for HE, the number of places available at institutional level and budgetary considerations. At the European level, however, there has not been a common policy either for education in general or HE in particular between the state members (Pearson *et al.*, 2000). In contrast, the educational structure of studies and competence remain at national level. For example, as the Chapter Three demonstrates, in Greece there is a weak link between education and employment. In other words, there is a mismatch between labour market requirements and the outputs of the educational system.

In this regard, attempting to generalise about the reforms of HE in Europe becomes complicated, as it is difficult to identify clear terms of reference and points of comparison (Teichler, 2002). In other words, this lack of clarity arises from educational, social, cultural and politico-economic differences that shape each member state from one period of time to the next. By taking this issue into consideration, the next section tries to explore the graduate labour market in general terms. At this point it should be mentioned that references and examples are derived mainly from the British literature but the main issues are generalised to European level.

1.3 The Graduate labour market

The current trend in all European markets is the continuously growing number of young people entering tertiary education. There is conventional wisdom, typically propounded by policy makers, that relates certain supposed changes taking place in the labour market to a perceived need to increase and expand higher education. This position is often prescriptive in nature and assumes that a 'knowledge economy' is being developed around a more professional (and assumed 'educated') workforce and because of this more graduates are needed. However, there is another school of thought that questions whether this expansion is naturally beneficial to graduates, employers and society alike. Indeed, recent research conducted in this area (Purcell *et al.*, 2002) reveals that a significant proportion of graduates experience difficulty in accessing employment which makes full use of their potential, while some employers complain that they are unable to fill their targeted vacancies with candidates of the appropriate *calibre*.

The gradual shift from micro-level explanations to a more complex cross-level understanding about the hiring process leads to the general argument that existing research in this area is far too simple to adequately capture the complex factors that influence the graduate employment as important determinants. Bearing this in mind Ramsay and Scholarios (1999) note that the potential impact of socio-political and cultural variables is significant in shaping graduate employment in any country in a specific period of time. These 'multiple social realities', as Ramsay and Scholarios (1999) call them, can be interpreted through an alternative explanatory framework based on a socially constructed, rather than socially determined, view of employment processes. For instance, according to this school of thought, if a firm takes on a

graduate in a secretarial job, that graduate may not be more productive than a less educated secretary. As Green explains:

‘The main issue in graduate employment is not the qualifications graduates require for recruitment to the job, but whether the qualifications are deemed necessary for actually doing the job’. (1999:3)

According to the socially constructed view, there is a continuous interplay between actors and interest groups involved in the graduate employment process (e.g. employers, graduates, government, academic and professional bodies) and social processes and institutions within which these actors’ interpretations are formed and enacted (societal and cultural norms, the legal system, economic forces, business values and sector patterns). In the context of this study, it is fair to say that the increase in the number of graduates entering the labour market has had a fundamental impact on labour supply, challenging employers’ and graduates’ perceptions of the relationship between HE and potential employment. The recent, significant, expansion of HE has generally been regarded as beneficial to the economy without any serious attempt to ascertain whether or not the economy has the capacity to absorb such an increasing supply of graduates or achieve a good fit between the skills and knowledge developed with the HE system and the competencies sought by employers (Purcell *et al.*, 2002). Against this backdrop, tensions are arising due to the increasing importance of the effectiveness of the HE in responding to labour market needs.

A matter of equal importance is the observed differences in socio-economical and political factors among different countries (Shackleton and Newell, 1994). It will be argued that, specifically in Greece, a systematic exploration and analysis of the variables associated with employment outcomes is required to understand better how degrees contribute to employment access and economic prosperity,.

This study draws upon this framework to explore graduate employment at both micro and macro levels of analysis. Against this backdrop, the next section considers the changes and trends in graduates' skills and responsibilities from the employer's point of view. In this context, graduate skills mismatches and job requirements within the labour market are presented. Secondly, current debates on the potential and future career trajectories of graduates are examined.

1.3.1 Employers' perceptions on graduate employment

There is growing assumption that increasing market competition is widening the range of jobs open to graduates (Green, 1999). Many experts and key players seem to agree that the substantial expansion in HE has necessitated constant readjustment between HE and the world of work. As Alpin and Shackleton (1997) suggest, the increasing number of individuals entering higher education implies that young labour market entrants now have much higher attainments than in the past, which means that formal qualifications do not any longer provide a sorting mechanism. This may lead employers to screen applicants for graduate posts much more carefully. Thus, one of the main questions that the study needs to explore is whether there is a close link between HE studies and employment. In other words what does a graduate job entail?

According to Pitcher and Purcell (1998) it is likely that any definition of 'graduate employment' and the relative advantage of such qualifications to individuals will change as an increasing proportion of the population obtains HE qualifications. Therefore, it is pointless to give a general definition of what a graduate job entails, as a uniform graduate labour market does not exist. This means that, as a heterogeneous group of graduates enters into the labour market (e.g. non-traditional groups such as

mature students), the range and diversity of career outcomes for graduates is likely to increase as well. In their attempt to address the extent to which the occupational structure and organization of work has changed as a result of HE expansion, Elias and Purcell (2003) developed a two-fold classification of graduate jobs: the *external classification* of the jobs graduates do as indicated by job titles and descriptions; and the *intrinsic* classification which assess basically the number of key competencies (skills and knowledge) that graduates bring to and use in their employment. According to the authors, both classifications are very useful in helping our understanding of graduate skills and qualifications and how these are utilised within their jobs. In this context, Elias and Purcell try to explore the relationship between the external and internal dimensions of the jobs performed by graduates in order to classify the work that graduates do. By using graduate destinations, they identify a framework of a five-fold classification (based upon the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification) of graduate employment that reflects both the demand for their graduate skills and qualifications and the extent to which these are used within their jobs (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: *A classification of graduate occupations*

Type of Occupation	Description	Examples
Traditional graduate occupations	The established professions, for which historically, the normal route has been via an undergraduate degree programme	Solicitors Medical practitioners HE, FE and secondary education teachers Biological scientists/biochemists
Modern graduate occupations	The newer professions, particularly in management, IT and creative vocational areas, which graduates have been entering increasingly since educational expansion in the 1960s.	Chartered and certified accountants Software engineers, computer programmes Primary school teachers Authors/ writers/journalists
New graduate occupations	Areas of employment to which graduates have increasingly been recruited in large numbers; mainly new administrative, technical and 'caring' occupations	Marketing & sales, advertising managers Physiotherapists, occupational hygienists Social workers, probation, welfare officers Clothing designers
Niche graduate occupations	Occupations where the majority of incumbents are not graduates, but within which there are stable or growing specialist <i>niches</i> which require HE skills and knowledge	Entertainment and sports managers Hotel, accommodation managers Midwives Buyers (non-retail)
Non-graduate occupations	Graduates are also found in jobs that are likely to constitute under-utilisation of their HE skills and knowledge	Sales assistants Filing and record clerks Routine laboratory testers Debt, rent and cash collectors

Source: Elias and Purcell (2003:5)

The types of graduate employment include 'traditional' graduate occupations which academic degrees are required and 'modern' graduate occupations where a wider range of skills is required. 'New' graduate jobs appear to require a combination of managerial and interpersonal skills (e.g. Recruitment Consultant), technical and managerial skills (e.g. Business Analyst) or interpersonal and technical skills (e.g. Social Worker). The last two categories include 'niche' graduate occupations, which

require HE skills and knowledge in business services, communications and consumer services, as well as 'non-graduate' occupations.

Based on the assumption that the overall level of employment has expanded during the last decade this classification tries to assess any changes in the balance of these occupations as a result of the expansion of HE. According to their findings the most significant areas of employment growth have been among 'New Graduate' and 'Modern Graduate' occupations. These findings appear to be consistent with the occupational changes described in the previous section. More specifically, it was noted that the most significant change over the last decade has been the increase in the number of people employed in managerial, professional and service occupations. For example in the UK, the proportion of people employed in managerial and professional occupations has increased by almost 1.6 million people (DfEE, 2001) between 1991 and 2001. Business and public service associate professionals have also seen a significant increase. There were 211,000 more science and technology professionals (e.g. engineers and scientists) in 2001 than there were in 1991. Numbers employed in technical and specialized sales occupations have increased substantially with the creation of an additional 153,000 new jobs. These findings appear to be consistent with the occupational trends in the Greek labour market. For example the current situation in Greece implies that apart from professions requiring a high level of specialisation (such as the medical professions and IT technicians), a person can virtually take up any occupation regardless of formal qualifications and training background or any other relevant qualifications (Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1997).

While the above review of the changing sectoral and occupational pattern of employment provides some useful insight into the changing demand for skills, it is only a partial picture. In particular, the relationship between specific sectors and occupations and the types of skills and qualifications required to perform a job effectively, is changing constantly for a range of reasons, including the introduction of new technologies, changes in work organisation, regulatory requirements or changes in customer demand. In this regard, it is fair to say that whilst Elias and Purcell's (2003) classification of graduate occupations is useful, their analysis provides no evidence of what is happening in reality. In other words, it offers little explanatory insight into the factors that are impacting upon changes in the demand for qualifications and skills and, most importantly, of any increase in the proportion of graduates remaining in non-graduate jobs after completing their degree studies. At this level, further empirical investigation is required.

Whilst the above analysis suggests increases in high skilled graduate jobs, an alternative interpretation is possible. According to Green (1999), perceptions of real skill change might occur as a result of changes in job requirements. This is normally the case where employers demand higher levels of qualifications for what is essentially the same job (credentialism). Some commentators argue that the increased demand for qualifications by employers does not necessarily correspond with an increase in the skill content of jobs. As Gallie (1994) notes, skill levels might have increased either because a person had been upwardly mobile into a higher level job or because the existing job had been restructured in a way that increased its skill content. For example, the analysis so far has not considered the changing nature of occupations themselves. Whilst the actual occupational titles and classification

systems remain stable, the actual content of particularly jobs may have changed, it may have become more or less 'skilled' (Green *et al.*, 2001). The tracking of 'within-occupation' changes in skills is crucial to our understanding of trends in the demand for skills within the graduate labour market (DFEE, 2001). Moreover, increasing educational attainment and an increase in the actual stock of skills held by the employed workforce does not necessarily imply that these are necessary or appropriate for the actual jobs that people do (Mannocada and Robinson, 1997, in DfEE, 2001). On a more general basis, it is worth noting that the value of qualifications changes over time as the supply of and the demand for them changes.

'The restructuring of the labour market has led to changing demand for skills and concern about potential mismatches between the needs of employers and competences developed in HE courses' (Pitcher and Purcell, 1998:179). If this is currently the case, it is crucial to understand the significance and implications of ongoing skill rises within the workplace and the relevant premiums to graduates (Machin *et al.*, 2002). According to Lissenburgh and Bryson (1996), employers are questioning whether the holding of a degree is appropriate or necessary prerequisite for the jobs they want to fill. As they explain, across sectors, many employers are moving away from qualification requirements and towards evidence of competencies including generic skills (communication and team-working) and personal attributes (commitment, hard work, working experience). Similarly, findings from Harvey *et al.*'s (1997) research reveals that employers want adaptive recruits 'who can rapidly fit into the workplace culture, work in teams, exhibit good interpersonal skills, communicate well, take on responsibility for an area of work and perform efficiently and effectively to add value to the organisation' (*ibid*: 1). The question here is whether employers really need

graduates to respond to their job requirements. However, as Jenkins (2001) argues, although there is a widespread belief that certain skills are important for success in the labour market, it is difficult to define precisely what these skills should be. As well as including formal qualifications and technical knowledge, it also now encompasses softer 'people skills' and psychological traits such as the ability to perform in a team, decision making and communication skills. (Payne, 2000). But as Welch (1999) claims, far from alleviating recruiters' difficulties, this wide diversity of attributes and skills makes the right candidates even harder to find. This is because qualification mismatches have little to do with skill mismatches. As Jenkins (2001) notes, a careful look at the data provided by skill surveys reveals a continuing increase in skill shortages. For instance, the Skill Needs in Britain (1999) survey provides information on hard-to-fill vacancies and it seems that in 1993 the percentage of hard-to-fill vacancies was significantly low (16 per cent) compared to 35 per cent in 1997 and 42 per cent in 1998¹. Moreover, a more recent report by the Employer Skill Survey (2000) provides information on vacancies, hard-to-fill vacancies and skill shortage vacancies by occupational group.

¹ One explanation for this is to do with the state of the economic cycle, from recession and out of it.

Table 1.2: *Vacancies, hard-to fill vacancies and skill shortage vacancies by occupational group*

	Vacancies	Hard to fill vacancies	Skill Shortage Vacancies
Managers & Admin	7	5	7
Professionals	6	5	8
Associate Professionals & Technical	11	12	17
Clerical and Secretarial	16	9	9
Craft and Related	8	14	22
Personal & Protective Services	15	17	11
Sales	19	16	13
Production & Process Operatives	11	13	9
Other	7	7	3
Total	100	100	100

Source: National Skills Task Force, *Employers Skill Survey, Statistical Report, 2000*, pp. 35-39

As Table 1.2 illustrates, there is not a clear association between occupational groups and skills mismatches *per se*. The main areas where there are skill shortages, such as craft and related occupations, are not traditional graduate destinations. For the IOD (Institute of Directors) this is part of the problem of HE expansion, that too many people are studying for a degree and the basic craft professions are suffering as a result because, for example, no one wants to train to become a plumber. In this regard, hard-to-fill vacancies are not the same as skill shortages and many misinterpretations can occur when drawing inferences about skill shortages from evidence on hard-to-fill vacancies alone. Having realised this, the first report of the National Skill Task Force tries to distinguish between skill shortages, skills gaps and recruitment difficulties.

According to their definitions:

'*Skill shortages* occur when there is a genuine lack of adequately skilled individuals available in the accessible labour market...In contrast, *skill gaps* appear where employers report that their workforce has lower skill levels than necessary to meet

their requirements, or where new entrants to the labour market are apparently trained and qualified in their field but still lack a variety of skills required for their current job...Finally, *recruitment difficulties* is a wide term incorporating all other forms of employer recruitment problems except for skill shortages and skill gaps as defined above'. (Jenkins 2001:5)

However, this categorisation can be questioned as it is sometimes difficult to interpret issues related to graduate employability. This is because within work settings many employers are moving away from qualification requirements and towards evidence of competencies including generic skills and personal attributes (i.e. work experience). For instance, there could be a case where an employer is suffering from skill shortage because either there is a low number of graduates with the required skills but lack of work experience that meets the company demands, or graduates lack required qualifications.

These points make it more difficult to evaluate the current situation about graduate utility, skill shortages and gaps. In general, analytic studies of the labour market suggest that one feature of the current skills shortage is the widespread lack of important generic skills and social skills such as problem solving skills, customer services, flexibility and communication skills (Payne, 2000). Bearing this in mind, Harvey and Green (1994 cited in Harvey et al., 1997) argue that one of the reasons for this inconsistency is the view that education is perceived as a 'once-and-for all' activity, which ignores the need for life-long learning and skills updating. In the context of the Greek graduate labour market, a very important question that a study needs to investigate is the extent to which degree skills and graduate competencies could be utilised in their work settings.

It is fair to say that, any research on the relationship between HE and employment cannot be examined without reference to the perception of the graduates' themselves. As noted, if the analysis relies principally on the information on occupational status and skill changes over time, too many graduates tend to be characterised as 'over-educated' or 'under-employed' (Teichler, 2002). Yet, it is possible to integrate the view of graduates themselves into the analysis, because since the 1970s graduates were often asked in surveys to consider the transition from academia to work. Therefore, the aim of the next section is to explore the graduate transition from academia to work, perceived utilisation of academic studies, perceived adequacy of occupation and finally the extent of the expectations and job satisfaction.

1.3.2 Graduates perception on career trajectories

According to Graham and McKenzie's research (1995), the move from education to work can be particularly difficult, especially for new graduates with little working experience. As Keenan (1995) explains, this is particularly true where most students go straight from school to University. Transition from academia to employment could be viewed as a process at the end of which a more or less optimal match between the competences and qualification of graduates and their work tasks is reached (Teichler *et al.*, 1997). However, the current situation in Greece indicates that there are serious mismatches between what Greek employers are seeking and what skills and qualifications graduates possess. This has been noticeable during the last decade where the transition to employment might have had a significant impact on graduates' degree choices and their eventual career trajectories (Katsanevas, 2004). Therefore, factors such as the structure of the HE system, study outcomes and the role of family

will be investigated in this study as important determinants in shaping graduates' perceptions on the value of their degree studies as well as their career trajectories.

According to Nicholson and West (1989), the early period of adjustment to the business environment is delicate and complex. As Graham and McKenzie (1995) note, it involves four critical elements – associated with the shifting from academia to effective work adjustment – which are: a change in culture, opportunities to acquire competence and confidence (early experiences that promote positive feelings and employer expectations) and levels of graduate commitment and satisfaction.

Dealing with these elements, the National Commission of Education (1993, cited in Graham and McKenzie, 1995), argues that a good start in the world of work might have a significant impact on new graduates' attitudes and behaviour in their working life, as well as in terms of economic benefits to employers. With regards to the first issue, this shift from academia to employment is related to changes in graduates' cultural background and stability. More specifically, the cultural background involves the individual in the creation of identities concerned with gender, home and social life, career patterns, and beliefs and values. Thus, the transition from academia to employment is affected by a series of inter-linked and interacting factors, such as geographic location and local labour market conditions, gender, ethnicity, and educational attainment (Keep, 1994). Social class and cultural attitudes also arbitrate this process, towards the value of HE and training, which create high graduate expectations for direct employment and strong future prospects. For example, a survey conducted by Metcalf (1997) reveals that social background appears to be

strongly correlated with employment outcomes, even among graduates. Therefore, those from lower social backgrounds have fewer opportunities for further study or have limited waiting periods in their job hunting for a desirable job compared to those of a more advantaged background. These factors help identify how far students have clear career trajectories in mind when they decide where and what to study and their career expectations.

As Pitcher and Purcell (1998) report, most of the graduates in their survey did not have a clear focus on what they would like to do after finishing secondary education studies. Therefore, they have seen HE rather as the next obvious step in the adult labour market than a first step up the vocational ladder. Research conducted by Graduate Prospects (2004) identified three kinds of graduate seekers. First, 'career planners', who had undertaken their courses with a clear view of where they wanted to get to and who were most likely to be in an appropriate job and satisfied with their career development. Second, 'adapters', graduates that had not thought ahead when choosing their course, or who had changed their minds after their undergraduate studies. Third, 'drifters', are the kind of graduates who had not had clear ideas at the outset and were still experimenting with a variety of options or waiting for something to turn up. Some were deliberately drifting by postponing career development for an infinite period, but most were unsatisfied with the situation and looking for more appropriate opportunities. By taking these kinds of graduate job-seekers into account it is clear that employment patterns must be considered in relation to the outcome of academic studies and it is already obvious from this evidence that there is diverse range of graduate career paths. More importantly, this analysis suggests that we have more or less established perceptions as regards a differentiation of career outcomes.

However, it is very difficult to generalise graduates' perceptions at a European level, as there are many differences in graduate career outcomes among European countries.

In general terms, as Teichler (2002) comments, two dimensions need to be addressed:

'the *horizontal* dimension, which concerns the relationship between the field of study and knowledge on the one hand, and the area of work and the kind of work tasks on the other. Also the *vertical* dimension, which concerns the appropriateness of the level of employment, in terms of the position or profession, in relation to the level of the educational attainment and credentials' (Teichler, 2002: 201)

As White and Gallie (1998: 265) explain in their research concerning employer policies and life changes: 'Employers' policies could influence mobility in two chief ways: by affecting the opportunities offered to individuals in entry points and, by affecting opportunities within an employment, for example by providing or denying career ladders'.

According to Teichler *et al.* (1997), many studies on graduate employment measure the value of investing in study in general or show differences in employment 'success' according to a field of study. But such a research approach has hardly any value as feedback for HE, i.e. in explaining the impact of various characteristics of HE on graduate employment and work. The loose linkage between field of study and subsequent employment in the labour market should be borne in mind when interpreting these results. Therefore, it is important to understand how the educational system prepares people for employment.

There is a widespread assumption that effective academic programmes are likely to reduce the problems of graduates' transition from education to employment, whilst at the same time increase the performance of individuals. There has been a multitude of

studies aiming to measure the changes of graduate employment and work in the process of HE expansion. An overview by Teichler (1999) reveals that such studies set indicators such as employment status, the link between study and sector of employment and occupations as well as income levels to educational investment and field of study and career opportunities. However, it is important to recognise that the practice of measuring graduate employment and associated career outcomes, as well as the duration of the transitory period, varies substantially from one country to another. As Teichler *et al.* (1997) reveal, on one hand, annual British graduate surveys are undertaken about half a year after graduation. On the other hand, French surveys on the area of graduate career trajectories are conducted 33 months after graduation. These surveys suggest that a graduate survey at about this period is suitable for measuring the stability or change in early careers.

Also a mismatch seems to exist in the rise in continental Europe between certain fields of study and employment for graduates of certain profiles. According to Teichler (2000), this could lead to a situation where a graduate has a clear idea of his career trajectories, particularly in countries where degree disciplines tend to be clearly geared to certain professions, whereas in certain other countries the links between fields of study and occupational areas are relatively loose. For example a Greek study by Karmas *et al.* (1987) reveals that, in the Greek context the employability of graduates is influenced by the context of their academic studies. It is reported that vocational degrees graduates are more likely to be in occupations that correspond to the degree studies compared to those graduates from theoretical degree disciplines. Another example is in the UK where graduates have always been more likely to enter fields of employment remote from their HE studies. Less direct utility of the HE

courses is a predictable consequence for such graduates (HEFCE, 2001). With regards to this issue, Graham and McKenzie (1995) claim that there are clearly significant differences in ways of working and learning in HE compared to work. As they note: ‘the Quality in HE project has highlighted that there is still a mismatch between what employers appear to want and what HE provides’ (1995:6). Bearing this in mind, many of the criticisms levelled by employers at the educational system, accuse universities of not producing people immediately prepared for a place in the workforce. A European study conducted by Teichler (2002), in the area of graduate employment and work, shows the perceived limited link between study and employment/work and job satisfaction about four years after graduation in ten European countries.

Table 1.3: *Perceived limited link between study and employment/work and job satisfaction in Europe (percent)*

Country	Little use of knowledge	Wrong field/HE not necessary	Level of education hardly adequate	Current work situation worse than expected	Dissatisfaction with current job/work
Norway	5	3	3	7	4
Sweden	12	7	7	22	11
Finland	12	9	6	15	9
United Kingdom	25	27	18	24	18
The Netherlands	16	12	8	10	7
Germany	23	15	16	17	12
Austria	17	16	13	13	10
France	37	26	22	24	14
Spain	25	15	17	38	13
Italy	21	14	22	30	18
Total	19	14	14	19	11

Source: CHEERS Graduate Survey, p. 49

Table 1.3 shows, about one fifth of the European graduates surveyed stated that there is little use of the knowledge and skills acquired in their course of study on the job. This finding was most pronounced amongst French graduates (37 per cent) and least pronounced amongst Norway graduates (5 per cent). The survey also reveals that about one sixth of the graduates believe that there is a loose relationship between their field of study and their work tasks. Indeed, almost one third of the British and French graduates do not see a direct match between their field of study and current work responsibilities, while such a mismatch is hardly reported by graduates from Norway and other Nordic countries. In general graduates from the ten surveyed European countries express the belief that there is a mismatch between their educational studies and their current employment. However, it is fair to say that perceptions of the working situation varies systematically among graduates from different countries. The above viewpoint could have possibly been shaped by the different social and value systems of each individual country. Bearing Greece in mind, it is fair to say that up to the time of this study there was not any research conducted which examines directly the graduates' perceptions regarding the 'smooth' transition from education to employment and expectations for future careers. Therefore, the main concern of the following part of the section is to provide a theoretical background based on the past research conducted at the international level regarding the transition process from education to employment, different types of graduates and the length of time spent with an employer.

According to Teichler (2002), in recent years, emphasis has been placed on the transitional period from study to employment, which may or may not be smooth in different labour markets. His results revealed that in Mediterranean countries the long

duration of the transition process seems to have caused graduates great difficulty in finding a suitable job. Therefore, graduates from these countries spent the first four years after graduation predominantly on occasional jobs or short-term employment. Two significant factors might explain this phenomenon across Europe. One is that graduates are mismatched into jobs only temporarily. For example, graduates either join a company with short-term contracts or accept low-level job while they continue searching for work more suitable for their qualification level (Green and McIntosh, 2002). However, a drawback to this explanation is given by Dolton and Vognoles (2000) whose results show that, amongst graduates who were mismatched into one job, some two thirds were still working in a job for which they were overqualified six years later. According to Green and McIntosh (2002), the second factor implies that some 'rigidities' which may be related to family commitments, whereby the presence of a partner or, especially, children or elderly people, may prevent individuals from accepting a more appropriate job. As Green *et al.* (2001) report, part-time employees are more likely to be found in this category.

In addition to this issue, Lissenburgh and Bryson's (1996) research tried to find a significant relationship between different types of graduates and the length of time they spent with an employer. One conclusion from their research was that, demographic characteristics, family background, region, schooling and household circumstances have influenced significantly the time graduates spent in full time jobs. This research focused on differences among those graduating from different disciplines, rather than the qualifications or work experiences that graduate might have. Due to this, Pearson commenting on the IES Annual Graduate Review (2000), said that:

‘Those graduating in sciences, mathematics and engineering-based degrees², as well as education were the most likely to move in the short-term into high level managerial, professional or technician jobs and have the lowest unemployment rates. However, despite the good job prospects, the number starting degrees in humanities, languages and biological sciences, have the highest initial unemployment and the lowest proportion entering the graduate jobs’. (IES, 2000:2)

Also, evidence from work history surveys reveals individuals’ experiences and perceptions of differences in gender. It is important to note that throughout the post-war period there were significant changes not only in the industrial structures and patterns of work but also in the societal attitudes towards women in work that is reflected by the fact that there is an increase of educated women entering the labour market (Rubery and Fagan, 1994). As Elias (1994) note such differences between men and women are significant in terms of their disposition to start new jobs as well as their career prospects. For example, evidence from Humphries and Rubery (quoted in White and Gally, 1998) suggests that the experience of women in the labour market may be strongly affected by whether women are in full or part time employment, although less agreement is found on whether these differences are in the type of employees and their commitment to wage labour. In the context of this study it is very important to note that little research had been conducted which looks directly at the differences in male and female perceptions and career opportunities within the Greek labour market. Bearing this in mind, this study will try to assess the way in which socio-economic factors impact upon first, the formation of the current position of

² According to Lissenburgh and Bryson (1996: 51), graduates were classified according to the subject of their degree in the following way:

Graduates with **engineering or technology** degrees are those whose first degree was in any category of engineering, including electrical, electronic, general, civil, mechanical, aeronautical, production or chemical engineering; or in any field of technology, including minerals, metallurgy, ceramics and glasses, polymers and textiles, maritime or biotechnology.

Graduates in **mathematics or computing** are those whose first degree was in mathematics, statistics, computer science or information technology.

Graduates in **science** are those whose first degree was in medicine, dentistry, subjects allied to medicine, biological sciences, agriculture and related subjects or physical sciences.

female graduates within the Greek labour market and second, their opportunities for career progression within the Greek firms.

With regards to the latter issue, a study conducted by Williams and Owen (1997) reveals that the type of employer and the structure of organisations should be considered as important determinants in graduate employment. Their findings show that, as companies increase in size they are increasingly likely to recruit graduates. Micro and small firms are more likely to recruit on the basis of suitability for the job rather than qualifications. In other words, these firms prefer experienced staff with tight specialisation rather than inexperienced graduates with career prospects. In the context of our study it is fair to say that in Greece the weak link between educational institutions and businesses operating in the economic field is of particular importance. This phenomenon is attributed to the gap between the increasing number of graduates entering HE and the limited demand of the domestic economy for highly educated personnel. By looking at the structure of the Greek labour market it is noticeable that the base of the Greek economy consists of a large number of small companies (95 per cent according to Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1997) that cannot absorb the increasing number of graduates. Therefore, a detailed examination of the socio-economic impact of the various factors on the formation of graduate employment through a case study of Greece must come to our attention.

1.3 Summary

Through an analysis of the literature on graduate employment, over-education and education policies in Europe the expansion of higher education is perceived to be a desirable ambition in terms of the benefits to individuals and the economy at large. More specifically the chapter has shown that the pace of change in the workplace during the last three decades has led to an increased pressure on HE institutions to provide degree courses that equip students with the skills and attributes that will facilitate the education to employment transition and foster subsequent career progression. However, as our review of the literature reveals, university education cannot be expected to provide students with a complete and comprehensive skill-base in preparation for future employment (Nabi and Bagley, 1998). According to Teichler *et al.* (1997), in all European countries HE has diversified during the last decades as far as linkages of the field of study and segments of the employment system are concerned. Yet, at the same time, questions are being raised by some academics about the value of a degree and whether the academic qualifications are deemed necessary for actually doing the job.

In an organisational context, it must be noted that organisations are not isolated from the wider economic, social and political environment in which they operate. Due to environmental changes, it is difficult to determine the specific tasks required for the available graduate vacancies, which drive organisations into different strategic choices over time, and the kind of people required to correspond effectively to these changes. As a result, the profile of graduates within organisations may change over time. Last but not least regional differences in the relationship between HE and employment must be taken into consideration by any researcher who wants to explore

the phenomenon of graduate employment across Europe. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the extent to which Greek graduates' expectations of the transition from education to employment and their career expectations, decisions and outcomes are shaped by a specific national environment, labour market structure and social culture.

Therefore, the aim of following two chapters is to give an insight in the nature of graduate employment through a case study of Greece. By focusing on the career trajectories of graduates in one specific country, we develop a multi-level analysis of the dynamics of graduate employment. The analysis traces the historical evolution of the structure of higher education in Greece and assesses the subtle interactions between higher education structure and policies and labour market trends.

Chapter Two Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This chapter links our conceptual discussion on the current issues that higher education in Europe faces with the methodology adopted for this study. As noted, the study explores some of the issues currently being debated around higher education through the lens of a country specific case study of Greece. The aim of this chapter is to investigate the methodological considerations shaping the research approach deployed in this study, particularly in terms of the decisions governing the overall research strategy and method of the study. Section 2.2 examines the methodology adopted, based on a methodological approach which views social reality as internal to human actors and based upon an interaction between individuals and the society in which they exist and function. Section 2.3 considers the scope of the study, relating this discussion to the relative merits of conducting a case study of a single country. It also describes the research techniques adopted for this thesis. The presentation of the findings is briefly explained in section 2.4, while a short summary is outlined in section 2.5.

2.2 Methodological assumptions and choice of methodology

The starting point in all social science research is the fact that there are many issues and subjects about which we have incomplete knowledge. Therefore, the focus of each researcher is to add something of value to the body of accumulated knowledge (Remenyi *et al.*, 1998). As Strauss and Whitfield (1998) comment, all research studies are guided by a strategy as to how their main objectives can be best achieved. The various approaches to research can be classified based on epistemological and ontological considerations. 'The type of explanation generated by these two

approaches is characterised by alternative philosophical assumptions about the nature of human action (ontological assumptions) and how this nature can be revealed through research (epistemological assumptions)' (Wass and Wells, 1994: 2) There is a long-standing debate in the social sciences about the most appropriate philosophical position from which methods should be derived. On one side there is the positivist and on the other the phenomenological approach. In practical terms, it is fair to say that the key idea of positivism is that the 'social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than been inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition' (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1991: 72). Thus, the positivist approach to research is distinguished by its *hypothetico-deductive* driven approach (e.g. decisions which are based on theory) with a methodological emphasis on generating *quantitative* data from structured research instruments such as experiments and surveys, to establish causal relationships between variables (Knell, 1996). By contrast, the phenomenological approach to social science 'emphasize(s) the analysis of subjective accounts that one generates by getting inside situations and involving ones self in the every day flow of life' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979: pp.6-7). The data that are generated are typically *qualitative* in nature and tend to be collected through less structured methods, such as participant observation and / or unstructured interviews. Overall, this can be termed an inductive approach to research, where the researcher attempts to understand what is happening and why it is happening and which theory can be generated from the data gathered (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). The key differences between positivist and phenomenological approaches are clearly described in the Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: *Key features of positivist and phenomenological paradigms*

	Positivist paradigm	Phenomenological paradigm
Basic beliefs:	World is external and objective Observer is an independent scientist Science is value-free	World is socially constructed and subjective Observer is part of what is observed Science is driven by human interest
Researchers should:	Focus on facts Look for causality and fundamental laws Reduce phenomena to simplest elements Formulae and test hypotheses	Focus on meaning Try to understand what is happening Look at totality of each situation Develop ideas through induction from evidence
Preferred methods	Operationalise concepts so they can be measured Take large samples Use multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena	Small samples investigated through induction from evidence

Source: Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 1994:27

As Table 2.1 shows, many advantages and disadvantages could be considered regarding the beliefs and methods that underpin both phenomenology and positivism.

When choosing to locate a study within a particular paradigm, the researcher is also choosing a particular methodology. As Rist (1977) argues:

‘When we speak of ‘qualitative’ or ‘quantitative’ methodologies, we are in the final analysis speaking of an interrelated set of assumptions about the social world which are philosophical, ideological and epistemological. They encompass more than simple data collection techniques’.

(Rist, 1977, cited in Bryman, 1988:5)

However, Bryman (1988) challenges this epistemological standpoint arguing that in practice there are many researchers, especially in the management field, who adopt a *pragmatic* view (Whipp, 1998: 52) by deliberately combining methods drawn from both approaches in order to achieve their research objectives and questions. The choices made for this study regarding its research design were consistent with Sayer's (1984) position that the selection of methods must reflect the nature of the object of study. This approach suggests that 'rather than viewing different methodologies and research designs as competing they may be viewed as complementary and may be combined in order to compensate for weaknesses in individual methods' (Stuart, 1999: 38). As Wass and Wells (1994) note, in these terms, a survey could be used to establish the extent and pattern of particular events, supplemented by qualitative data to identify the processes underpinning the identified events. This 'pragmatic' approach to research design suggests that it is of vital importance to the researcher to look at the appropriateness of the particular research designs (intensive, extensive) and techniques to be used, either in isolation or combination, via an assessment of the issues to be addressed, an identification of what is to be explained, and the types of relationships to be investigated. In this respect, the choice of a particular research strategy is determined by the relative merits and limitations of various research techniques.

The rest of the chapter will analyse the specific research design and research techniques employed by the study and explain their relevance to exploring the dynamics of graduate employment in one European country.

2.3 Research design

This research started the same way as most research projects: with a basic idea of the topic to be investigated, but with the depths of the research still to be discovered. Through an analysis of the literature on graduate employment, over-education and education policies in Europe a research problem and question was formulated, and eventually refined. In contemporary political terms, the expansion of higher education is perceived to be a desirable ambition, in terms of the benefits to individuals and the economy at large. Yet, at the same time, questions are being raised about the value of a degree and whether there are enough 'graduate jobs' that correspond to the increasing number of graduates. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the following question: to what extent are graduates' expectations of the transition from education to employment and their career decisions and outcomes shaped by a specific national environment, structure and culture?

After reading extensively on higher education structure and policies and graduate employment, a decision concerning the research strategy was made. The literature review revealed that few studies had been conducted regarding the Greek situation, which directly examines graduates' perceptions of their studies and graduate career trajectories. Extant research conducted in this area showed that in various countries, employment predictions and policies around education and employment are made within a broader spectrum of official labour market information that includes, highly elaborated national systems of occupational classification. Yet, many of these studies are descriptive and say little about the correspondence between higher education outcomes and labour market trends. Other studies have sought to measure the changes in the nature of graduate employment and work as a result of Higher Education

expansion. For instance, an overview of the field by Teichler (1999), reveals that such studies link employment status, sectors of employment, occupational positions, income levels and career opportunities to educational investments and fields of study. Whilst such studies offer some explanation of the relationship between higher education and employment, they are typically not derived from *primary research with graduates or other key actors*. Instead, the relationship is inferred from other measures. Furthermore, while the above studies were able to identify an association between higher education and graduate employment outcomes, methodological weaknesses limit their causal validity and explanatory potential. This is because graduate employment and career outcomes are likely to vary substantially according to the country. For instance, as Teichler *et al* (1997) reveals, annual British graduate surveys are undertaken approximately half a year after graduation¹. In many other developed countries, research concerning labour market prospects is also taking place. For example, French surveys on the area of graduate employment are conducted 33 months after graduation.

More fundamentally, relatively little research has examined the ways that national context / culture impacts upon graduate expectations, decisions and career trajectories. Research, which has attempted to look at country-specific factors, has tended to be positivistic in nature.

¹ The Institute of Employment Research of the University of Warwick has been a pioneer in labour market forecasts ever since 1975, outlined in various publications such as Britain's Medium Term Employment Prospects (1978), Economic Change and Employment Policy (1980) and Labour Market Forecasts by Occupation and Education (for a review of the economy and employment publication visit the Warwick institution website: <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/ier/pmaf.htm>). The Institute of Employment Studies, UK, also undertakes related research.

Katsanevas (2002), for example, adopted a positivistic approach to assess the trajectory of graduates from their studies to certain professions, to test the hypothesis whether there was a notion of correspondence. Thus, he tried to identify the future tendencies in graduate supply within the Greek labour market by classifying the demand for a profession or specialization over a five-year period, from 1998 to 2003, in the following way:

Very positive	++
Positive	+
Neutral, unpredictable or undefined popularity	0
Negative	-
Very negative	--

This categorization is on a scale from very positive to negative; the higher the positive number (++) the more popular the profession in the labour market and the higher the negative number (--) the less popular the profession. Whilst the study suggests that a survey can provide useful information on the stability or change in graduates' early careers, the positivist framework adopted was deemed unsuitable for this thesis as it is inadequate to explore the issue of graduates' career trajectories in depth by taking into consideration the perceptions of key actors involved in this process. In this respect, it became apparent that knowledge on graduate employment could be further enhanced if a more open posture was adopted: that is, if we were to let findings emerge from the field. Following Ramsey and Scholarios' contextual framework (1999), this study adopts the view that:

'The need for a more complex cross-level understanding about graduate employment leads to the general argument that existing research in this area is far too simple to adequately capture the complex factors as important determinants which influence the career activities of graduates'.

(Ramsey and Scholarios, 1999:73)

Under this view, the employment process is seen as an interactive process rather than an isolated one. Therefore, the focus of the current study is on the dynamic social relationship between individuals and the society as a whole, which embodies the preferences and choices of all parties in the process. Thus, the issue of graduate employment and, in particular, their career trajectories are framed as a continuous 'series of episodes in time' rather than single decision points (Ramsey and Scholarios, 1999:74). In this respect, the relationship of decision-makers with specific degree studies, particular occupations and sectors of employments as well as its social-cultural context in general will determine how graduate opportunities and careers are interpreted.

2.3.1 Research Strategy: A Case Study of Greece

Bearing these observations in mind, the methodological approach employed in this study is that of a case study of an individual country. According to Kitay and Callus (1998) a case study is:

'A research strategy or design that is used to study one or more selected social phenomena and to understand or explain the phenomena by placing them in their wider context'.

(Kitay and Callus, 1998: 103)

As Yin (1994) explains, such a research strategy is particularly valuable in answering questions of *who*, *why*, and *how* in management research. At an abstract level of analysis it is fair to say that over the last twenty years there has been much discussion of changes in labour market structure and its impact on graduate employment (for a review see Chapter One). In this context, tensions are arising due to the increasing importance of the effectiveness of higher education in responding to labour market needs. A matter of equal importance is also the observed difference in cultures,

ideologies and lifestyles as well as in the economic, educational and political environment among different countries (Shackleton and Newell, 1994). More specifically, as the same authors assert, culture, historical background, traditions and habits influence the career outcomes of graduates and such country differences can only be understood in the context of the specific national culture.

According to Yin (1994:6), a case study design can help understand the operational links that underpin such issues and identify various causal relationships. So, in terms of our study, we are interested in examining *how* elements of the national characteristics and cultural distinctions affect graduate choices and career trajectories and *how* and *why* certain educational and labour market policies shape graduate employment.

The case study approach is particularly appropriate for this study because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem (graduate decisions, perceptions and employment and career trajectories) to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale and at different levels of analysis. In this regard, the present study is focused concretely on the dynamics of graduate employment and the constraints within which it operates. It addresses developments of higher education in Greece historically and looks at the various social, political and institutional factors that impact upon the formation of the current higher educational system. It also assesses the subtle interactions between higher education structure and policies, organisations' recruitment strategies, and the country's culture and tradition. In short, the case study allows an examination of *how* the various influences are dispersed through the process of graduate transition from academia to employment.

According to Bell (1993, stated in Remenyi et al., 1998), the case study method has also been used as an umbrella term for a family of research methods having the decision to focus on an enquiry around a specific instance or event in common. The philosophy behind the case study is that sometimes only by looking carefully at a practical real life instance can a full picture be obtained of the actual interaction of variables and actors. By taking this issue into consideration it is fair to say that a case study analysis allows a flexible and open-ended nature of research where variables and actors are not predetermined but developed through the rhythms of the research process (Kitay and Callus, 1998:108). Thus, the key contribution of a case study analysis is its ability to follow specific instances as they arise, in an attempt to identify detailed interactive processes which may be crucial, but which are not transparent to the large-scale survey. The important point of using this method, then, is its uniqueness, because its intensive nature permits the study of a specific country with peculiar higher education and labour market structure. Thus, the rationale of a case study approach is to allow an in-depth view of processes unobservable in purely quantitative terms and develop an understanding, which may be of potential conceptual application to a wider population (Hamel *et al.*, 1993). In this respect, a case study approach may achieve what Yin (1989) refers to as 'analytic generalisability'. To be more specific, in the scope of our study, the case study approach can illustrate the relationship among social, economical and political issues and patterns of influence in particular context. The open-ended nature of the case study allows the employment of various research methods and techniques in order to collect all the necessary information and examine perceptions regarding the issue of graduate employment in Greece. According to Kitay and Callus 'the amount of

information, the level of detail and the decision as to when the data collection phase of the case study is complete are a matter of judgement' (1998:108).

Thus, it is the aim of the case study to provide a multi-dimensional picture of the situation (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). Having said that, it is fair to say that a case study approach is weak in terms of external validity and broader generalisability, in terms of a quantitative illustration or representation and in terms of population validity. Yet, this is not the aim of the case study, as we noted above. Rather the merit of a case study can lie in its detailed analysis of a single (perhaps unrepresentative) case.

2.3.2. Research techniques

The study made use of secondary data analysis, a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. The *secondary analysis* scrutinised extant data sets on the Greek labour market, in order to uncover existing evidence relating to the actors involved in graduate employment. The *survey* sought to describe the perceptions of a sample of graduates across two disciplines. Finally, *semi structured interviews* aimed at an in-depth understanding of the ways in which a country's environment, structure and culture impact upon graduates' perceptions, choices and employment and career trajectories.

2.3.2.1 Secondary data analysis

The present study utilised a range of secondary data to examine current trends in graduate employment, employer perceptions towards graduates and more general labour market information on Greece. Statistical information was drawn from the most recent employment and education projects conducted by the following

government institutions: Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED); The Labour Force Survey by the Institute of Labour (I.N.E./GSEE); The National Statistical Office of Greece (E.S.Y.E); the National Centre for Social Research (E.K.K.E); The Research Centre of Equality Matters (KETHI); and finally, the balance of demand and supply of professions associated to higher education studies by the Ministry of Education. The last publication generated information on the balance of demand and supply within the Greek labour market (see Appendix I), which defines which professions are upcoming and appear to offer positive job prospects and which have limited or negative job prospects and are coming down or are saturated. This helped to determine the choice of the two samples of graduates from two disciplines in the survey component of the present research.

The choice of the secondary data as described above is likely to be relatively reliable, because of the systematic rigorous nature of the data collection process and the large samples used (May, 1997). However, the analysis of the secondary data is not enough to give complete responses to our research objectives. Since the aim of the study is to understand the ways in which a 'national environment', context and culture impact upon the relationship between higher education outcomes and graduate career trajectories, it requires in depth research and acknowledgements of the contexts in which it takes place. The next step, therefore, was to consider how to design the primary research to achieve these aims.

2.3.2.2. Graduate questionnaire survey

The second component of the empirical work involved a questionnaire survey of a sample of political science and public administration and nursing graduates.

According to Saunders *et al.*:

'The use of questionnaires are one of the most widely used survey data collection techniques. Because each person (respondent) is asked to respond to the same set of questions, it provides an efficient way of collecting responses from a large sample prior to quantitative analysis'. (1997:244)

In total, 481 questionnaires were distributed during summer 2002 among a potential population of 965 graduates. Overall, the survey elicited 240 usable returns, a final, and respectable, response rate of 49.9 per cent (for a detailed breakdown of the questionnaires see Chapter Four). More specifically the potential students' population according to enrolment tables (Ministry of Education, 2004) and the overall distribution of the questionnaires is summarised in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: *Potential graduate population and distribution of the questionnaires*

	Potential population	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number of questionnaires returned
University of Athens Political Science and Public Administration	300	250	123
Pantion University Department of Public Administration	195	115	47
Technological Institute of Athens Nursing Department	420	116	70

Source: The figure of the first column were taken from the Ministry of Education and Social Affairs website: www.ypepth.gr

With regards to the distribution of the questionnaire, it is important to recognise that two different methods were used to generate data. This is because of the difficulty that

the researcher experienced in generating a matched (comparable) sample of people between two quite different academic disciplines with different orientations. Efforts to generate a matched sample were made difficult by the practical nature of the nursing environment. Many difficulties arose with negotiating access with associate institutions due to the lack of personal connections of the researcher with target organisations. More specifically, in big hospitals, it was difficult to gain access to databases of graduate nurses, even where the initial negotiation process had been successful. A random sample of nursing graduates was eventually found by accessing a public and private hospital operating in the Attica region of Greece, as well as through access to the files of a recruitment agency (a breakdown of nursing graduates and their response rates in each organisation is presented in Chapter Four). This decision was aided by an offer of support from the Union of Nursing in Athens and a Senior Health & Social Policy Consultant; both were willing to facilitate access within these hospitals. This collaboration was helpful in reducing the time and resources allocated to the survey.

In the case of political science and public administration graduates a random sample was largely selected from the place of graduation (a breakdown of political science and public administration graduates and their response rate is presented in Chapter Four). The participant universities are located in Athens and these are:

1. Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Athens
2. Department of Political Science, Pantion University

The decision to target the above university departments was based on two factors. First, the researcher's academic background (as an ex graduate of the department of political science and public administration) facilitated the cooperation of the

respondents. Second, these two departments are the only departments offering these particular programmes in Greece. By selecting a random sample of two particular cohorts of the above departments we were able to ensure that the results from the sample were closely aligned to the national picture.

To ensure a high response rate, a considerable number of the graduate questionnaires were personally distributed to explain the study's purpose and ensure confidentiality. In this regard, the aims of the survey were to gather data on graduates' pre-degree decisions, perceptions and career activities, and then to explore these issues further via the qualitative research. The questionnaire was structured into three sections: the degree initial choices and skills development through academic studies; post degree decisions, career choices and trajectories; and finally, family commitments. The selection of the questions was based on the broader themes of the research notably:

- ♦ The role of school and family in shaping career decisions
- ♦ Graduate recruitment and selection methods
- ♦ The external labour market
- ♦ The relationship between higher education and employment
- ♦ The qualifications that employers are looking for in graduates
- ♦ Perceived graduate expectations and career prospects.

In this respect, our questionnaire used both *factual* and *opinion* type of questions. By using *factual* questions the researcher was able to explore graduates biographical details such as age, level of education, career activities etc. Respondents were surveyed five years after graduation and provided information on their education background, career paths and their current working situation. With regards to education, every period of further education (first degree, second degree, master, Ph.D.) undertaken by the respondent was recorded, whether or not it has been

completed. Every period of employment, unemployment or inactivity was also recorded. By recording all these data for education and work, the survey attempts to build up a complete record of activities for each individual in the sample since graduation (a copy of the questionnaire is cited in Appendix II). With questions of *opinion* we gave the opportunity to graduates to express their perceptions and experiences freely². This followed the position that:

‘If the story or the case study is useful and it contributes to an understanding of the world or explains interesting phenomena, then the case (our emphasis) or story value will be acknowledged and it will become an integral part of society’s knowledge base’.
(Remenyi *et al.*, 1998:185)

The questionnaire data were collated and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for Windows in order to establish a data set for both disciplines, which has been presented in Chapter Four in both a descriptive and analytical way.

2.3.2.3 Interviews

Certain types of techniques are not adequate to gain an understanding of the way in which graduates’ decisions, choices and employment and career trajectories are shaped by a country’s culture, structure and environment. In this study two groups of interviews were conducted. The first group consisted of 12 interviews with graduates from Political Science & Public Administration and 10 interviews with nursing graduates. The principal concern of the interviews was to examine respondents’ viewpoints regarding their pre and post degree decisions, their employment and their

² Since the research is conducted in Greece, the translation of the questionnaires as well as the data may not be as accurate as desired, due to difficulties experienced from my previous research, in writing meaningful questions and translating the raw data from Greek to English. Thus, it is very difficult to ascertain that the questions written in one language are exactly equivalent in meaning to those in another.

career outcomes. We were concerned here to unpack some of the quantitative threads emerging from our survey analysis.

The second group of interviews was held with 3 career advisors, 2 university professors, 2 recruitment consultants, 2 senior sisters and one employer. The principal concern of the interviews with these key informants was to obtain more detailed information from respondents with different professional backgrounds and viewpoints regarding the higher education system, labour market structure and the nature of graduate employment and also, again, to explore in more detail some of the issues raised in the graduate questionnaire. Such an approach strengthens the study by providing a multi-level analysis of all the key actors involved in graduate employment.

In this respect, it is fair to say that while the questionnaire was designed to gather broad data on graduates' experiences on their outcomes of degree studies and their employment opportunities after graduation, interviews sought to explore in more detail the dynamics of graduate studies, the relations between graduates and the labour market, work experience and career development.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of a list of themes and questions that needed to be uncovered. In practice, this meant that some questions were omitted in some cases, given the specific context of the interview. The order of the questions also varied depending on the flow of the conversation (Saunders *et al.*, 2000). Also, interview questions helped the research to get a good insight into a situation. They also provided 'shortcuts to the prior history of the situation, so that the investigator can readily identify other relevant sources of evidence' (Yin, 1989: 26).

The main advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that it provides the opportunity to probe answers, where interviewees need to explain something they have said or build on their responses. It may also lead the discussion into areas which have not previously been considered but which are significant for the research (Saunders *et al.*, 2000).

The interviews were normally administrated as part of an informal discussion. This is because questions regarding graduates' work history or current employment status were considered to be sensitive and potentially intrusive. This was more intense amongst nursing graduates because the interview was conducted in their place of work. According to May:

'the semi-structured approach is very useful for the researcher to freely follow the flow of the conversation, probe beyond the answers given and request expansion when required'. (1997:93)

However, there are a number of data-quality issues that can be identified in relation to the use of semi-structured interviews. For instance, the lack of standardisation in these interviews may lead to concerns about reliability. Another concern about reliability is related to interview bias: this is when the comments, tone or non-verbal behaviour of the interviewer creates bias in the way the interviewees respond to the question being asked. In order to cope with these potential problems most of the interviews (30 out of 32) were tape recorded, respondent permitting. This process allowed the researcher to concentrate more intently on questioning and listening, and ensured that direct quotation could be used in the written analysis.

In addition to the interview programme, the researcher spent two weeks in the career centre of Piraeus, one of the most organised career centres in Athens. There, the opportunity arose for observation through a series of meetings with the director and other career advisors. The aim of this was to allow the researcher to gain a deeper insight into the issues, perspectives and activities of the target persons set in their 'natural settings' (Walsh and Wiggins, 2003: 100). This participant observation was used as background to the research and was very useful as it gave the researcher an opportunity to view the interaction between graduates and career advisors, gathering data that might not have been elicited by a questionnaire or interview. More specifically, information was obtained which covered the main areas of graduate activities, current surveys conducted in this area as well as other centre's activities. Finally, access was granted to the career centre database giving valuable background information on graduates' first destinations, and graduates' files and briefings from past conferences conducted in the area of graduate employability in Greece.

2.4 Presentation of the findings

Our analysis of the findings will be presented in three chapters providing both quantitative (Chapter Four) and qualitative analysis (Chapter Five and Six). Within the empirical chapters the analysis of the data has been organised on a thematic basis, drawing data from each discipline's findings. The usage of individual quotations within the empirical chapters has facilitated the presentation of the thematic discussion, although it should be noted that the anonymity of all individuals is protected in the presentation of the material. A summary of the main findings will be highlighted in the concluding chapter.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has briefly outlined its core conceptual and empirical concerns by reviewing the importance of methodological considerations in shaping decisions over research strategy and method. In this regard, it considers the scope of the study, relating this discussion to the relative merits of conducting a case study of an individual country, thereby enabling the researcher to employ different research strategies and techniques in order to explore the issue of graduate employment in depth by providing a multiple level analysis. The use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis allows the researcher to benefit from the advantages of each method used while trying to minimize the impact of their individual weaknesses.

The following chapter situates the issue of graduate employment within the dynamics of a country's specific characteristics - in this case Greece. It outlines historical developments of the higher education system and looks at the various social, political and institutional factors that impact upon the formation of graduate employment in Greece.

Chapter Three

The Historical Context of Graduate Employment in Greece

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to situate graduate employment within the context of one country. This chapter explores the dynamics of HE and graduate employment in Greece. It addresses developments of HE in Greece historically and looks at the various social, political and institutional factors that impact upon the formation of the current higher educational system. Specific consideration is given to the way that the Greek labour market is structured and how its characteristics shape graduate employment.

In the next section, the expansion of the Greek educational system is documented and assessed, paying particular attention to the reforms since the 1980s. The current government policies in higher educational practice and associated tensions are also analysed. The third section gives an insight into the current employment issues the Greek labour market faces. Given the current level of academic debate about education and employment, the focus of this section is on the examination of the employment opportunities of those people graduating from different HE institutions and different degree studies. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of the main issues considered.

3.2. The evolution of tertiary education in Greece: The legislative framework in an historical context

Concern over education in Greece started in 1827, when it was declared that it was the responsibility of the State to provide education and the first Minister of Education was appointed. The aim during this period was to link education with society's needs by establishing 6 types of educational establishments: a model school called 'orphanage' to train

teachers for the craft schools, a central school whose graduates were destined for higher studies, an agricultural school, a religious school ('Ecclesiastical school') and finally a central military school (Eurydice, 2000).

However, the modern foundations of the Greek educational system were laid during the reign of Otto, the first Monarch (1833-1862), by the decrees of 1834, and 1837. These decrees attempted to eliminate the 'dysfunctional' characteristics of Greek education, such as its pseudo-classicism¹, the lack of practical orientation and the inability to establish education for the people (Eurydice, 2000). The decree of 1834 introduced a vertical structure with seven years compulsory schooling. Pupils could attend its three last grades at an independent three-years 'Hellenic School' the graduates of which could be admitted to the four year secondary school (named *gymnaseio*) after writing examinations (Eurodyce, 2000).

One of the most important decrees was that of 1837 which introduced HE with the creation of the Otton University of Athens (*The Greek University of Otton*). This had four faculties (medicine, law, theology and philosophy). It is fair to say that up to then, the theoretical-classical oriented directions prevailed in HE, and had done since ancient times².

The 1895, 1899, 1913, 1917 and 1929 decrees were all put forward by liberal progressive governments and were concerned mainly with matters of major educational change. The main

¹ The imposition of Ancient Greek language in the schools, provided education in grammars and letters, but the substance of the ancients' humanistic education was not retained (Kazakos, 1990).

² More specifically, HE, as it exists today, finds its roots in the time period prior to 1636. The Greeks were concerned with overall education. According to Cartledge (2002), members of the Greek society were interested in preparing individuals to be successful in life, a shared idea between many civilizations of that time. Greeks believed a focus on physical, aesthetic, and intellectual development was important for well-rounded learning, this idea is seen today in many programming models for residential housing. Athens, Greece was especially interested in developing citizens and giving students the tools to be prosperous in roles of political or public life. Philosophical leaders of the time were influential educators and encouraged frequent questioning and scepticism of what was being taught. Each leader had a unique purpose for HE. Socrates and Plato were interested in producing "enlightened" rulers and political advisors, while Aristotle sought to pursue knowledge strictly for the sake of pursuing knowledge.

reforms highlighted within these decrees were the provision of free and compulsory primary education; establishing a second route in 'Hellenic School' for lower-class children who would end up in the labour market (Tsoukalas, 1981) leaving the 6 years gymnasium, which led to university studies, mainly for middle and upper class children. Yet, the most significant feature of the 1913 reform was the creation of a second school direction, i.e. technical and vocational schools for people who could not continue their studies at universities. Its aim was to prepare students for life.

With the turn of the century, more systematic efforts were made to 'democratise' education. All policies that emerged until the middle of the century, were bound for a social process in education. The Karamanles' reforms of 1958-1959 were the most profound within the Greek educational policies. For the first time education was viewed as an investment intended to meet the techno-economic needs of the country (Persianis, 1998). The reforms could be interpreted as a move towards the socio-economic preparation of the country for meeting the challenges of the European Common Market in 1961 and therefore, the development of education was included as part of the national economic planning (Persianis, 1998). However, it is important to mention that during 1960s, all efforts to continue educational reform were suspended. This could be explained by the fact that during this period Greece was subject to the Kondylis and Metaxas dictatorship. Until the 1970s, the German educational model, named Humboltien, governed the organisation and operation of the university sector.

When democracy was reinstated in 1974, the climate was in favour of major political, social and educational reform. Basic measures were taken in order to modernise education during the seventies. The 1975 Constitution was established education as a main priority for the

state, and the years of compulsory education were increased from 6 to 9. Also, following the recommendations of international bodies (such as the World Bank, OECD), technical education was introduced in the National education curriculum. It is important to note that ever since the reform of 1913 there had been a pressure to establish a second educational network (technical education), but this did not become a reality until the reform of 1976 when the educational system was enlarged with the creation of a horizontal division (Technical- Vocational Lyceum called KATEE). The importance of this reform was that, up to that time, in Greece, the process of entering the higher levels of education had only one educational network: Primary School-Lower Secondary School (Gymnasium)-Upper Secondary School (Lyceum)- University. Under the reform of 1976, the secondary education system was divided into two different cycles. The first included the general lyceum and the second, the technical-vocational lyceum for those who chose to enter the labour market and obtain a vocational profession.

It has been recognised that the Greek educational system was highly centralised, both in terms of organisation and administration (Eurodyce, 2000). In the decades following the 1970s reforms, there had been efforts to reform, modernise and decentralise the educational system through a series of major legislative measures (Ministry of Education, 1995). Andreas Papandreou's Socialist Government that came in power in 1981 intended to introduce democratisation and modernisation. The university entrance examinations were reformed in 1981 when the Ministry of Education introduced the 'system of the two-directions' certificate. The former direction was for those people wishing to study humanities and the latter for those people wishing to study science. It must be noted that under this examination system, named 'Panhellinic' (national), participation in examinations was compulsory in order for a student to enter into tertiary education. Also the exams were conducted

simultaneously throughout the country with common subjects selected by a special committee of the Ministry of Education. Papandreou's Government emphasised the importance of higher education studies for the Greek society 'by establishing post-lyceum preparatory centres for the free coaching of candidates who had failed their university entrance examinations and allowed an unlimited number of sitting in the entrance examinations' (Persianis, 1998: 74).

With respects to HE, in 1982, an effort was made to restructure university education (AEI) by voting in Parliament a new law, in an attempt to enable the universities to move away from the German model towards a more liberal and flexible system (Act 1268/82).

In parallel with university institutions, Technological Educational Institutions (TEIs) were established in 1983 under the Act 1404. Their essential aim was to admit lyceum graduates that did not wish to proceed to university studies and educate them in such a way so as to perform in the labour market as vocational professionalists. Thus the most important difference between TEIs and AEIs was the fields of vocational training on offer. TEIs were more geared towards the application of the most up-to date technological know-how and professional practices, while AEIs were basically scientific and research institutions that provided students with theoretical and practical training (European Commission 1999- 2000) These two institutions also differed in terms of the time required to obtain a degree. For universities the duration was eight semesters for all departments. The departments that were exempted from this norm were the engineering and dentistry departments where the duration of studies was ten semesters and medicine where it was twelve semesters. For technological educational institutions (TEIs) the duration of studies was six or seven semesters plus one semester of working placement. TEIs were organised and functioned along similar lines to

AEIs. Commenting on this Gouvias (1998) explains that TEIs were seen not only as an attempt to improve standards in the provision of higher technical and vocational knowledge, but also as a way to diminish the trend for higher competition in university examinations. Indeed, Kalamatianou *et al* (1988) highlighted that some of TEIs educational activities were developed in the same broad field as university ones. This meant that the graduates of technological institutions were now competing in the labour market for the same jobs.

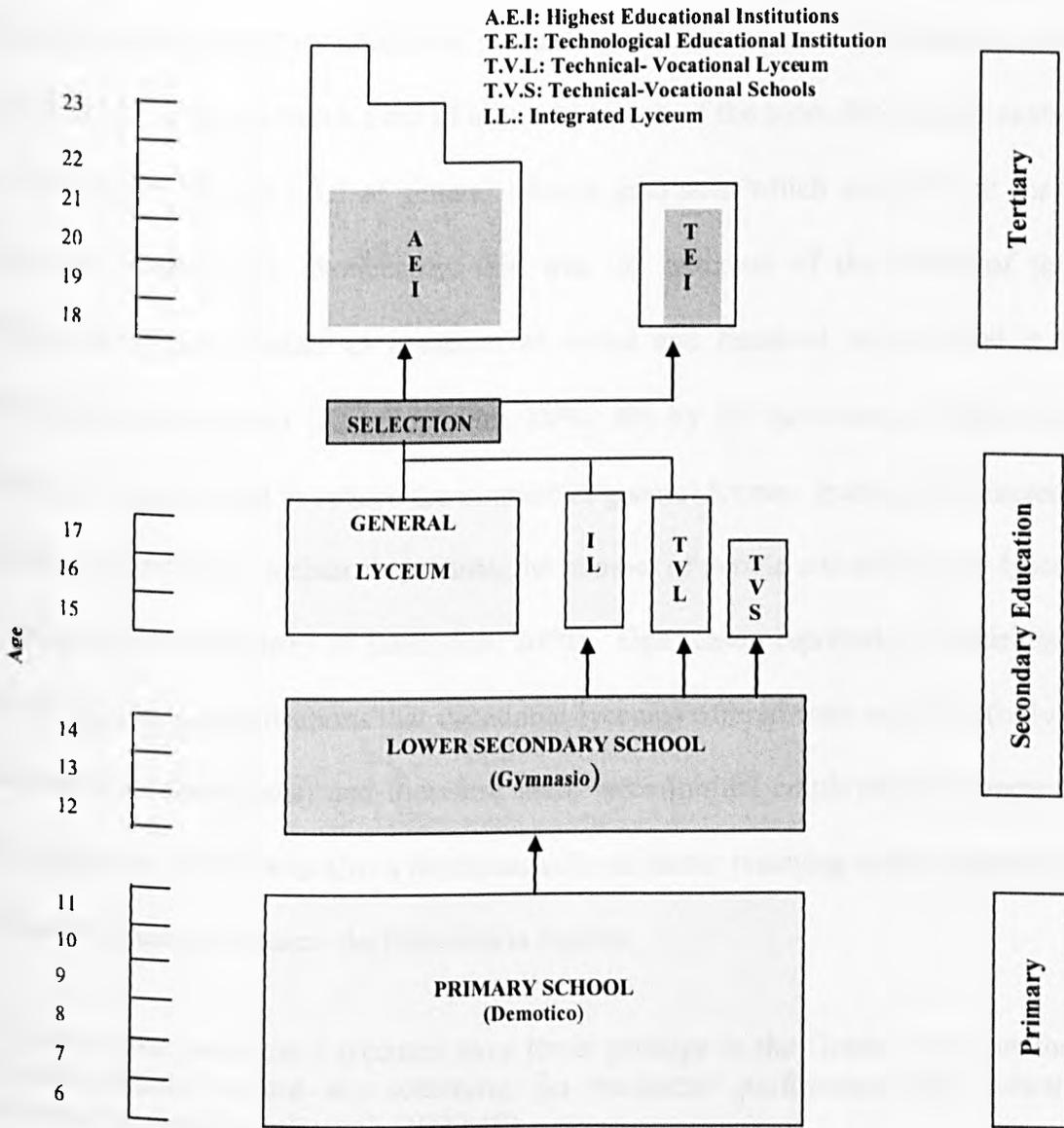
In summary it is fair to say that till the present day, the formal educational system of Greece was built mainly on a 6-3-3-4 year basis. The role of the state in the evolution and functioning of this system is dominant, as the great majority of educational institutions are public and schoolbooks are free of charge in all levels. With regards to HE, according to the Greek constitution (Act 16), tertiary education institutions are self-governed public legal authorities.

Moreover, all HE institutions in Greece impose limits on the numbers of enrolments in the different departments. Only students with an upper secondary certificate can take the entrance examinations in subjects connected with the field of study they have opted for (Kanellopoulos, 1996). Applicants list the field of study and institutions in which they are interested in order of preference and they are then given guidance on the basis of this list. HE institutions offer only as many places as they can provide, a fact that the Greek State must always need to take into consideration (European Commission, 1999-2000).

As Figure 3.1 shows, only those who complete general lyceum studies (12 years of formal education) are eligible for entrance to tertiary education institutions after a successful participation in the nationwide annual general examinations. The graduates of the technical

and vocational schools can either enter the labour market or continue their studies at the second grade of a technical lyceum (Kanellopoulos, 1996).

Figure 3.1: *Articulation of the Greek formal educational system*



Source: Karmas and Paleokrassas, 1985

As the next section shows, a remarkable increase in the number of university students has taken place during the last two decades.

3.2.1. Students' participation in HE institutions

In general terms during the 1980s and 1990s the most important features of the formal educational system as recorded by Kanellopoulos (1996:65) '...were the rapid expansion in number and fields and the increased number of students in the tertiary education'. With regards to the first issue, it is evident there had been a remarkable increase of those students attending general secondary education. According to Kanellopoulos (1996) there were many reasons resulting in this trend: First of all the abolition of the secondary school examinations in 1984 created a large pool of general lyceum graduates which aimed to sit for national exams for entering HE. Noticeably, this was the outcome of the desire of the Greek households for HE studies as a means of social and financial success and it was not administratively *imposed* (Kanellopoulos, 1996: 68) by the government. Even though the Greek government tried to reduce the number of general lyceum graduates by increasing the number of vocational / technical lyceums, the number of people attending these lyceums was considerably low (Ministry of Education, 2002). One reason reported by Tortiridis (1990a: 54) was that, the specialisations that vocational lyceums offered were very few (only those of machinist and electricians) and therefore there were limited employment opportunities for their graduates. There was also a dominant cultural factor resulting in the increased number of general lyceum graduates. As Patsoulakis reports:

'Graduates from vocational lyceums have lower prestige in the Greek society as they enter technical schools without any screening. So graduates' performance and potentials are questioned by Greek employers'. (1990:40)

Therefore public opinion on technical and vocational education is still unfavourable in comparison to that of general education. Greek government tried to respond to the increased demand for HE by creating new academic departments and technological institutions as well as by increasing the number of entrants. By the 1990s, there were thirteen university

institutions. Up to that period, the number of state universities was eighteen (Kokosalakis, 2000).

According to Protopapas (1999), for example, the tendency of the Greek Government to increase access to university education during the last two decades, has led to an overall 10 per cent increase in the number of students entering HE, while the graduation rate remained the same (7.4 per cent). This practically means that the HE system has increased in terms of student numbers. Yet, the number of academic staff remains the same.

Furthermore, the establishment of countrywide examinations for entrance in HE might also be considered as an important factor contributing to the increasing number of students entering tertiary education. This is reinforced by the general lyceum orientation, which essentially prepares young people for universities and technological education institutions. As Gouvias (1998) explains, Greece has one of the most restricted HE systems in Europe not only because of the numerous policy clauses introduced by the State for the allocation of university places, but also because of the lack of alternatives to seriously challenge the state universities and other HE institutions on the grounds of prestige, job security and salary levels that a degree holder can enjoy. Whereas in the past winning a place in the lyceum would have been considered a success, during the last decade there has been strong public pressure for freer access to universities and other tertiary education institutions. But since HE places are limited, Greece has experienced a situation where the demand for places exceeds the supply. This imbalance was and still is controlled by the National Examinations system. The reasons for controlling the number of places available can also be related to labour market conditions, when too many -or too few- young people are graduating in particular subjects relative to the jobs available (Eurostat, 2001).

In more detail, between 1986 and 1990 the number of applicants virtually quadrupled, while the number of students (university and non-university) only doubled, which meant a drop in the overall success rate for admission from 27 per cent to 18 per cent (Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, 2002). In this regard, it is fair to say that people have been encouraged to enter HE and even the lyceum was geared towards preparing people for HE, yet places are still limited to HE due to the examination system. Whilst the aggregate statistics show a huge increase in the numbers studying at the HE level, these statistics obscure an underlying dynamic where the actual demand far exceeds the number of available places.

Mitsotakis's Government (1990-1993) attempted to reform the existing examination system in order to control the number of students entering HE. Shortly afterwards the prime minister's efforts deteriorated and the existing minister of education resigned as a result of widespread demonstrations and occupation of school buildings by secondary school students in 1992 who demanded an increase in the number of places in HE. The new minister invited the interested parties (students, teachers and parents) for a 'national dialogue of education' with no result. Thus, the examination system remained unchanged (Persianis, 1998).

However, it is evident that the number of HE institutions has slightly increased in the last decade - currently there are 19 universities and 14 technological institutions (Protopapas, 1999). Even though the number of academic institutions was slightly increased, the Greek government tried to respond in the social demand for HE by increasing the number of places offered within HE institutions (Kanellopoulos, 1996). As Table 3.1 shows only in the year 1999, there were 79,820 students' enrolments, of which 38,670 were admitted to universities and 41,150 to technological institutions.

Table 3.1: *Tertiary Education Students by area of studies (1999)*

Disciplines	Universities		Technological Institutions		Total	
	Enrolments	%	Enrolments	%	Enrolments	%
Humanities	6790	17,7	0	0,0	6790	8,4
Arts	790	2,0	690	1,7	1480	1,9
Law	1805	4,5	0	0,0	1805	2,1
Social Sciences	3516	9,7	0	0,0	3516	4,7
Communication and Documentation Studies	470	1,4	680	1,7	1150	1,5
Economics, Business and Administration	6027	14,6	10740	25,1	16767	20,1
Life Sciences	755	2,0	0	0,0	755	0,9
Natural Sciences	1913	4,9	0	0,0	1913	2,3
Earth and Environmental Sciences	820	2,1	0	0,0	820	1,0
Mathematics and Statistics	1737	4,4	0	0,0	1737	2,1
Computing Sciences	2710	8,2	2760	9,7	5470	9,0
Agricultural Sciences	1293	3,3	6750	16,3	8043	10,1
Technology and Engineering	3100	7,7	10910	24,7	14010	16,6
Architecture and Town Planning	675	1,6	190	0,5	865	1,0
Health Sciences	1765	4,5	4755	11,3	6520	8,1
Welfare	0	0,0	1075	2,6	1075	1,4
Educational Sciences	3299	8,3	340	0,8	3639	4,4
Sport Sciences	1060	2,7	0	0,0	1060	1,3
Services	30	0,1	2260	5,6	2290	3,0
Security Services	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
Interdisciplinary fields of study	115	0,3	0	0,0	115	0,1
TOTAL	38670	100	41150	100,0	79820	100

Source: Key data on education in the European Union, 2000

3.2.2 Current government policies in HE: practice and tensions

The modernisation drive that began in the 1980s with the Framework Act 1268/82, was completed towards the end of 1997 with the passing by the Greek Parliament of the educational reform Act 2525/97. This reform aggregated the system of equal access to education by reinforcing the concept of free education. It also modernised the institutional structures and functions in order to cope with the excess demand for places. The main reforms introduced by Act 1268/82 were as follows:

- ♦ The abolition of the general examination system from June 2000 onwards
- ♦ The creation of new open choice study programmes
- ♦ The restructuring of the study programmes of universities and TEIs

(European Commission, 1999-2000)

In response to the discrepancy between the supply and demand for places in HE, the government sought to abolish the general examination system in June 2000. This was replaced by a new system of admission to tertiary educational institutions. Under the new system, free access to HE was introduced, and pupils leaving upper secondary education were offered a wider choice of courses to study. The statistics for the year 2000-2001 show that due to the introduction of the new system of admission, the gap between supply and demand decreased significantly: out of 136,315 applicants for tertiary education, 85,532 entered HE institutions.

Table 3.2: *Number of enrolled students: Old and new system of admission*

Category of institution	Number of enrolled students	Old system of admission	New system of admission
Universities	40,325	11,473	28,852
TEI	42,020	11,366	39,654
University of Cyprus	91	29	62
Military Academies	1,450	381	1,069
Police and Fire Academies	1,646	412	1,234
TOTAL	85,532	23,661	61,871

Source: Ministry of Education, 2000

Last but not least, it is important to mention that under the new legislative framework that has been introduced, the role of the Ministry is restricted to monitoring the legality of the procedures of the universities with respect to the recruitment of new staff, while the recruitment of administrative staff has been entrusted to the institutions themselves (Kanellopoulos, 1996). The current imbalance between supply and demand with respects of places in Universities and TEIs is one of the greatest problems not only the Greek educational system but also Greek society as a whole faces. In spite of the improvements achieved in recent years, Greece still lags behind other European countries somewhat in terms of the percentage of the working population with HE qualifications. Therefore it is fair to say that,

while the expansion of admission places has increased during the last decade, it is very doubtful whether this has achieved the goals derived by policy makers to improve the quality of labour and match the supply of students to the demands of the labour market (Gouvias, 1998). Indeed, within the framework of the reforming acts that passed in 1997, it has been identified in policy statements (Act 2525/97) that provisions have been laid down to encourage Greek tertiary education institutions to be more receptive to the needs of the economy and of society, both in Greece and at an international level. However, as the following section illustrates, this is not always the case, as the Greek social and economic structure may be considered responsible -at least to some extent- for the production of different perceptions regarding the value of the academic studies within the society or / and the need for 'qualified' employees capable of responding to the current labour market trends. In this regard, the issue of getting a job is further complicated by the degree studied, student expectations and the changing nature of the labour market.

3.3 Links between education and employment

The aim of the following sections is to attempt to give an overview of the current changes in the structure of the Greek labour market in general and in graduate employment in particular.

3.3.1 Structure of the Greek labour market

During the 1990s, significant changes occurred both at the level of the economy as a whole and in the labour market. According to Lambropoulou (1995), postwar Greece has experienced a mass shift in occupational patterns from the primary to the third level of the economic sector and towards the field of services. The contribution of the tertiary sector both to GDP and to employment has risen, mainly against the primary, but also against the secondary sector (the so-called deindustrialization process). In addition, Patiniotis and

Stavroulakis (1997) argue that, another element characterizing the Greek economic structure is dualism, that is, the dichotomy between a relatively small number of well-organised or multinational firms with large numbers of employees, operating highly profitably in the international market and a considerable number of companies organized and run in the traditional way. These very numerous businesses that strive to survive both the domestic and international competition are the main employers of the workforce in the secondary sector. According to Liargovas (1997) the current situation in Greece is that, many Greek firms are SMEs that are specialized in low-tech, industry or services activities. Makridakis *et al* (1997), argue that these are typically run according to traditional management methods. More specifically, the survival of these small businesses depends on the owner manager and his / her family and they are normally characterized by relatively poor working conditions, low salaries and lack of expert knowledge. This has negative effects on the employment opportunities of highly educated personnel.

In the last ten years significant changes have taken place in the labour market. The Research Centre of Athens University of Economics and Business (1996) that employment in Greece has identified certain tendencies. First, there has been an increase in the number of people working in the public sector (about one third). Second, the number of employed individuals is rising significantly, while the number of the self-employed is decreasing. Third, the number of people involved in informal patterns of employment is rising simultaneously with the unemployment of educated people. In this respect, the following section tries to give an overview of the labour force participation in general and of the graduate employment trends in particular.

3.3.2 Labour force participation

Labour force participation in Greece continues to lag behind that of many EU countries, for both genders. During the period 1991-1995, there was an upward trend in the size of the population at the working age (fifteen to sixty five years old), combined with an increase in the participation rate, which reached 60.8 per cent in 1995 compared to 57.6 per cent in 1991 (Research Centre of Athens University of Economics and Business, 1996). The main reasons for this increase were the rising participation rates of women and the tightening of retirement conditions (Kanellopoulos, 1996). In addition to this it must be noted that recent data from the National Labour Force Statistics (2002) reveal that during the period 1995 and 1999 the participation rate for both genders for the age group under 20 decreased, an observation which is consistent both with demographic factors (i.e. the decreasing number of people of that age) and the increased emphasis on schooling (Kanellopoulos, 1996). For all other age groups the participation rate in the labour force increased.

It is noticeable, however, that the participation rate of female employees from 30 years old onwards decreased drastically compared to that of male employees (see Table 3.3). According to Yfantopoulos (2001), this is partly due to the child raising responsibilities of women, as well as to stereotypes of women's roles in the Greek society. Research conducted in this area by the Research Centre of Gender Equality (KETHI, 2002), investigated the position of women in the Greek labour market by examining female activity in relation to that of men. The following Table shows the working age population groups by gender. Whilst women make up 37.7 per cent of the working age population, their participation rate is only 32.3 per cent compared to 56.8 per cent for male participants.

Table 3.3: *Participation in employment in aggregate and by men and women. 2002**(Percentage)*

Total for the country					
	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment	Inactive	Total
Total	48.7	44.0	9.6	51.3	100
15-19 years	11.7	8.2	30.0	88.3	100
20-24 years	58.4	43.9	24.9	41.6	100
25-29 years	83.5	70.1	16.0	16.5	100
30-44 years	81.4	74.8	8.1	18.6	100
45-64 years	55.9	53.3	4.6	44.1	100
65+ years	4.8	4.7	0.8	95.2	100

Males					
	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment	Inactive	Total
Total	60.6	56.8	6.2	39.4	100
15-19 years	13.6	10.7	21.1	86.4	100
20-24 years	63.6	52.0	18.2	36.4	100
25-29 years	92.5	82.3	11.0	7.5	100
30-44 years	96.5	92.1	4.6	3.5	100
45-64 years	74.4	71.8	3.5	25.6	100
65+ years	7.7	7.6	1.1	92.3	100

Females					
	Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment	Inactive	Total
Total	37.7	32.2	14.6	62.3	100
15-19 years	9.8	5.6	42.6	90.2	100
20-24 years	53.5	36.2	32.4	46.5	100
25-29 years	74.0	57.3	22.6	26.0	100
30-44 years	67.3	58.7	12.8	32.7	100
45-64 years	38.5	35.9	6.7	61.5	100
65+ years	2.4	2.4	0.0	97.6	100
Total	37.7	32.2	14.6	62.3	100

Source: Kethi, 2002

Also relevant to our analysis is the gender occupational segmentation that takes place within the labour market. Male employment is dominant in primary industries, manufacturing, utilities and public administration. Correspondingly, we see that the sectors of education,

health and social work and extra-territorial organisations and bodies are characterised by intense female employment.

Table 3.4: *Employment by sector of economic activity and sex*

	TOTAL	MEN	WOMEN
Agriculture, hunting, and forestry	100.0	64.1	35.9
Fishing	100.0	57.3	42.7
Mining and quarrying	100.0	95.0	5.0
Manufacturing	100.0	96.4	3.6
Electricity, gas and water supply	100.0	68.8	31.2
Construction	100.0	82.8	17.2
Wholesale, and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles	100.0	98.8	1.2
Hotels and restaurants	100.0	64.0	36.0
Transport, storage and communication	100.0	87.0	13.0
Financial intermediation	100.0	57.2	42.8
Real estate, renting and business activities	100.0	60.2	39.8
Public administration and defense; compulsory social work	100.0	67.4	32.6
Education	100.0	38.3	61.7
Health and social work	100.0	36.5	63.5
Other community, social and personal activities	100.0	61.8	38.2
Private households with employed persons	100.0	9.4	90.6
Total	100.0	65.3	34.7

Source: Kethi, 2002

Moreover, the Greek labour market is also characterised by vertical segregation (i.e. gender segregation across grades within the same occupation). In particular, according to Petraki-Kottis (1996):

'in Greece the corporate doors have not opened to women as much as in other countries and only an extremely small number of the women who have managed to pass through them, have advanced to the upper levels of the managerial ladder'. (1996:30)

However, very little work has been done so far to investigate this situation. A relevant study showed that in the largest firms in Greece, women's participation in management, particularly at the higher level of the hierarchy, is non-existent or at best minimal and symbolic (Patrinos, 1997). The European Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Anna

Diamantopoulou (2003) revealed that the employment rate of educated females in the EU increased from 50 per cent in 1997 to 55 per cent in 2001. The unemployment rate for women in this category, however, is higher than that of men in all 15-member states. The smallest gap is noted in Northern Europe and the largest in Southern member states like Spain, Greece and Italy. As recent data from the Hellenic Communication Service (2003) shows, men take up to two thirds of the high-skilled jobs, service work, and the public sector jobs. The main obstacles to the advance of women in career jobs are preconceptions and gender stereotypes. There is not enough available information, however, to draw definite conclusions about how these opinions and attitudes were formed or why they were sustained despite the drastic changes in the Greek society and the aspiration and achievement of women in recent years (Petraki-Kottis, 1996).

3.3.3 The situation of female employment in Greece

Theodorou's (1999) research shows that there is a decrease in the participation rate of women of all age groups and that they also enter the labour market at an older age. Also, the phenomenon of women exiting the labour force once they get married or have their first child, without re-entering at a later stage in life, is very prevalent in Greece. Theodorou's research shows, there are different typologies across European countries. For instance, in other countries the participation rate falls during the years of family formation (25- 35 years old), but increases again afterwards when children grow older (Eurydice, 2000). The idiosyncrasy of this phenomenon in the Greek labour market is partly due to the problem of unemployment, the almost non-existent part-time employment (approximately 7 per cent), and social attitudes towards the employment of women in general and women with family responsibilities in particular (Maratou-Alibranti, 1995). However, as Lianos *et al* (2002) note, there has been a continuous increase in the number of employed women aged 25 or more in

the greater area of Athens, over the last decade. According to the same authors, that can be attributed to the improved educational level of women and the increased participation of married women in the labour force. By giving an historical overview of the development of female education and employment, it is important to stress that female employment in Greece was not very common until the mid- 90s. In particular, the percentage of married women that worked outside the family business did not exceed 10 to 15 per cent of married women in total. Maratou-Alibranti (1995) states that for the majority of Greek women, employment is not a choice but something that they have to do in order to cover family needs. For instance, if work creates serious problems, such as the fact that there is no one to take care of the children of the family, or the family needs are somehow covered, then the wife stops working. However, the exception to this rule is women with university education, who tend to work throughout their married life (Mousourou, 1984). The interpretation that is provided for this phenomenon is that women with university education have higher participation rates in the labour market because they have larger opportunity costs, since they have been training for longer periods of time. However, it must be noted that, in general, women with university education meet more obstacles in discontinuing their work during family formation years. Theorists, such as Rubery and Fagan (1994), suggest that motherhood and in particular the age of the youngest child is the main obstacle for the active participation of women in paid employment, since women with pre-school age children spend a large amount of their time in childcare (2.40 hours women who work, and 3.25 hours women who do not work). Additionally, motherhood, career progression and the age of the youngest child determine how many hours a mother can spend working outside the household, her flexibility to adjust the time and location changes, such as overtime and change of shifts or commuting (Symeonidou, 1990; cited in Mousourou, 1993).

One issue that the current study tries to explore is the employment opportunities of female graduates. According to research by Karamessini (2000) there are very few quantitative studies that provide statistical data on female employment. Yet, there isn't any qualitative study conducted in the area of graduate employment that explores in depth the perceptions of female graduates on their life choices and career trajectories. The only available information is through social security data, registered employment and unemployment statistical data for young people as well as longitudinal studies on people trajectories (Karamessini, 2000). As regards to this last point, the following section reviews the Greek HE literature. Its aim is to examine the employment opportunities of both genders after completing their tertiary education studies.

3.3.4 Graduate participation in the labour force and unemployment

A recent study conducted by Karantinos (1998) reveals that education is positively related to labour force participation and negatively related to unemployment. According to Ioakimoglou et al. (1998) this relationship is more marked for women. The following table shows that during 1995 people with postgraduate studies had the highest participation rates in the labour market (90.2 per cent), while people who had graduated from HE had the second highest participation (79.9 per cent) rates. In contrast, graduates of Secondary Education and Primary Education had low participation rates in the labour market, 55.4 and 44.6 per cent, respectively. Finally, people who did not finish Primary Education had the lowest participation rate in the labour force (22 per cent). At this point it is important to stress that the low participation rates in the labour market of people with low educational levels, the vast majority of whom are middle aged and elderly people, shows the limited opportunities that these people have for employment (Serafetinidis, 2001).

Table 3.5 shows the differences between the labour market participation rates of men and women. It is evident that the participation rates of women are significantly lower than those of men at all educational levels. However, these differences are obviously decreasing and in some cases become insignificant, as the educational level increases (Karantinos, 1998). Indeed, as Table 2.6 shows, at postgraduate level women's participation rates are better than men's.

Table 3.5: *Participation rates in the labour force, according to educational level, 1990-1995*

Educational Level	1990			1995		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
Postgraduate Studies	85.9	87.4	81.4	90.2	89.6	91.8
HE	80.3	82.6	77.0	79.9	82.0	77.4
Higher Secondary Education	62.0	80.5	48.0	55.4	69.6	43.7
Lower Secondary Education	66.4	83.8	38.8	44.3	58.4	25.6
Primary Education	53.7	72.6	35.8	44.6	61.6	29.2
Did not Finish	23.8	35.5	18.0	22.0	34.2	15.9
Total	54.4	72.2	38.3	48.9	63.6	35.6

Source: ESYE, Labour Force Analysis, 1990, 1995 cited in Karantinos (1998)

More recent data from the Greek Labour Force Survey reveals that, during 1999, people graduating from a Higher Technological institution had the highest participation rates in the labour market (81.6 per cent), while University graduates had the second highest participation (79.4 per cent). Primary and Secondary Education leavers had low participation rates in the labour market. Finally, uneducated people had the lowest participation rate in the labour force (15.8 per cent).

Table 3.6: *Activity and unemployment rates by educational attainment level and sex*

	Act. rates (male)	Act. rates (female)	Total
University Graduates	80.6	78.	79.4
Higher technological education graduates	85.9	77.3	81.6
Upper secondary education leavers	71.3	46.5	58.9
Lower secondary education leavers	54.3	28.5	41.4
Primary school leavers	57.3	29.9	43.6
Some year of primary school	26.7	13.2	28.3
No school at all	22.5	9.1	15.8
<i>All educational levels</i>	63.2	39.2	51.2

	Unemp. rates	Unemp. rates	Total
University graduates	4.9	11.2	8.1
Higher technological education graduates	10.0	20.7	15.4
Upper secondary education leavers	9.5	23.7	16.6
Lower secondary education leavers	9.1	24.5	16.8
Primary school leavers	5.5	13.6	9.6
Some year of primary school	6.3	4.4	5.4
No school at all	8.0	14.7	11.4
<i>All educational levels</i>	7.6	17.9	12.8

Source: NSSG, Labour Force Survey, 1999

Based on the above data, it is evident that people with university studies and primary school leavers have the lowest unemployment rates (8.1 per cent and 5.6 per cent respectively, while the average unemployment rate is 10 per cent approximately for the population in total, according to the Labour Force Statistics). The unemployment rate for Primary Education leavers is 9.6 per cent. Low secondary education leavers tend to have the highest unemployment rates (approximately 17 per cent). The phenomenon of high unemployment rates for Higher Technological Education graduates (15.4 per cent) is not typical of other European countries. The reasons behind this phenomenon are the steep increase in the number of HE graduates – and the inability of the labour market to absorb them (Karantinos, 1998).

Dealing specifically with the issue of graduate employment in Greece, a number of studies in this area are worthy of analysis. The first study was conducted by Pilavios (1980), who examined the parental participation in students' pre-degree decisions and environment. For Pilavios, students' career choices are based on family influences in terms of students' perceptions about careers and self worth. It is suggested that the family serves as a negative referent for young people by pushing them away from the experiences of their parents. This leads them to seek job security as a reaction to their background where, for the most part, family members are self-employed and prone to insecure work conditions (Kostakis, 1987). In Greece, public sector employment is the preferred destination for the majority of university-educated graduates due to the job security it offers to its employees (Glytsos, 1990). The range of fringe benefits enjoyed by the Greek public servants is extensive, including for example a generous annual bonus of 2.5 months' additional pay, overtime, housing and personal loans and children school fees allowances and other social benefits (Pilavios, 1980: pp.80-82).

Furthermore, as Gouvias (1998) notes, in Greece there is a tendency for more and more high-school graduates to follow a course in HE and probably continue for further studies as a way to cope with potential unemployment. With regards to this issue, Pilavios (1980) tried to highlight the peculiarities of the Greek HE system as part of the explanation for the above tendency. The most profound is, firstly, the unspecified period of studies that a student attends a Greek academic institution. This implies that students can register for an indefinite period and there is no age and time limit for the completion of a degree. Also, an individual can hold a civil service position and pursue a university degree at the same time. Lastly, as Gouvias (1998) notes, the Greek civil service and banking sector pay premiums to university graduates regardless of the day they were awarded their degrees.

However, it is fair to say that the social demand for HE is still very high, despite the fact that the monetary rewards associated with education are very low (Lianos *et al.*, 2002). Having said that, it is very difficult to directly determine the monetary rewards for some graduate disciplines because these do not have a direct counterpart in the labour market. As Ioannides (1999) explains, Greece is one of the very few countries in the EU where graduate unemployment remained the same even when the educational level of the country increased. This is because, as Karmas *et al.* (1987) states, the employability of Greek graduates is influenced by the context of the academic studies. It is reported that vocational degree graduates are more likely to be in occupations that correspond to their degree studies compared to those graduates from theoretical degree disciplines. The issue of getting a job is complicated further by the degree studies, expectations and the changing nature of the labour market. Alternately, the observed increase of higher institutions' graduates is not proportional to their employability in higher skilled jobs. As Ioannides (1999) explains, this is because very few companies in Greece need 'qualified' employees to perform their routine, repetitive and 'easy' to learn tasks. Katsanevas' research (2002) also reveals that even though a considerable number of people graduate every year from social and political sciences, those individuals have more difficulty getting a job because their programmes of studies are too theoretical. According to the author this seems to be a reflection of labour market change, because historically these degrees were seen as prestigious.

According to Katsanevas (1996) graduates of disciplines that correspond to expanding areas of the labour market can more easily secure a job. Giving his contribution to this issue, a recent study by Ioannides (1999) reveals that, even though graduate employment has increased, it is not because of the increased number of graduates but, because of the increased

number of new managerial and specialised positions, (e.g. Chemical Sales Representative) which require people with higher-level theoretical and practical skills.

In this respect, it is essential to examine what constitutes a graduate job in the context of this study. As Patrinos (1997) claims there is no clear definition of a graduate job in Greece. According to the same author (*ibid*: 7), Greece lacks a register of the occupations practiced in the Greek labour market. Such a register would serve as a foundation to forge links between education and the economic field.

At this point it is interesting to review the Greek HE literature regarding graduate employment opportunities within the Greek labour market. As the Greek poet Seferis states: 'In Greece we are whatever to declare to be', meaning that a great majority of people can practice almost any occupation irrespective of educational background and specialisation. In other words, as Patiniotis and Stavroulakis (1997: pp. 5-6) note, the peculiar occupational conditions in Greece have imbued the Greek employment system with distinct characteristics, such as *multi-employment*, *unstratified employment*, and *hetero-employment*.

Multi-Employment refers to the situation where an individual is occupied in more than one job. This phenomenon is usually seen among public-sector employees who take up a second job in the evenings. Overall, multi-employment seems to be a side-effect of the prevailing insecure working condition, coupled with the low standard salaries paid by the market.

Another type of employment is *Unstratified Employment*. That is the practice of the same occupation by people with the same specialisation, but having graduated from institutions with different educational levels (e.g. accountants having graduated from post-secondary

education and third level education). In this case, indicators such as age and hierarchical level play the most significant role. More specifically Patiniotis and Stavroulakis (1997:5) describe the role of seniority in many jobs. According to this issue, older people with more working experience, tend to be supervisors to considerably more academic 'qualified' albeit young graduates. What seems to be the case is that working experience is considered to be more important than academic qualifications. Yet, graduates often overestimate the value of their degree when seeking for a job. This perception is underpinned by the fact that in the Greek context most tasks, including those formally demanding advanced qualifications, are carried out by empirical methods, and involve competencies easily acquired within the brief period of the on-the-job training. In addition, patriarchic employers mainly make staffing decisions. This is a culturally rooted characteristic still prevailing in small and medium size Greek firms and in the public sector and often goes hand in hand with lower productivity (Papalexandris, 1986). Therefore, the poor content of jobs do not justify academic qualifications. Evidence from the research of Papalexandris (1986, 1992) supports this view by pointing out that even at the present time, young graduates prefer the security and tenure of state jobs resulting in many competent candidates not entering the private industry. This is due to the fact that in the public sector employees' promotions are based upon the years of experience in their position and not upon their job performance and development (Bourantas, 1990). Therefore, the relatively high financial earnings and benefits offered in the public sector, in conjunction with the limited employment opportunities in the private sector, have stimulated the demand for HE. Indeed, a study carried out among upper secondary school students showed that 72.7 per cent preferred to study in fields that could facilitate their employment in the public sector (Karmas *et al.*, 1987:86).

Finally, according to Patiniotis and Stavroulakis' typology (1997), the third type of graduates' employment is *Hetero-Employment*. This means that graduates follow an occupation that is different to their educational background, qualifications and specialization. The main reasons for *Hetero-Employment* is the high level of unemployment amongst young people (up to 10 per cent, according to the National Labour Force survey, 1999) and the surplus of graduates in the labour market. Having no other option than to become unemployed, many graduates apply for any available position, even if this involves 'non-graduate' jobs such as waiters, sales assistants etc.

According to Patrinos (1997) '*the incidence of overeducating graduates in the labour market occurs when they are not employed in their area of their specialization, or are working in occupations other than those for which they are trained*' (ibid: 210). Whilst this problem has historical roots (Tsoukalas, 1981), it was exacerbated in 1992, when political and economic changes led to the economic collapse of the Greek Diasporas. As a result a considerable number of overeducated Greeks entered the labour market at a time when demand for qualified people was low. However, the general belief that education was the main pathway for social mobility and financial rewards became part of the Greek culture. Yet, the universalisation of secondary education and the expansion of HE during the last 20 years resulted in an abundance of over-qualified degree holders, who were frequently forced to work in jobs where only a good standard of general education was required.

In Patrinos' research (1997), the incidence of over education varies considerably by discipline. The more specific the discipline, the less the negative effects of over-education on employment and earnings. According to his findings, the incidence of over-education is extremely low (between 1 to 6 per cent) for those graduates in engineering, science and

education disciplines. However, it is high for graduates in social sciences (around one third), agriculture (25 per cent), law (23 per cent) and the humanities (15 per cent). Noticeably, there is no over education for graduates in medicine and medical related disciplines.

In addition to this, Gouvias' (1998) research tries to present an occupational breakdown of graduates by sector of the economy. Looking at graduates' first destinations, the author observes an increasing number of graduates occupied in the financial and the public-service sector. The latter destination, as noted, is the most popular- although underpaid job - among young people, especially from the moment tenure has been secured.

Table 3.7: *Graduate employment by sector of economy*

	University	T.E.I	Total
Agriculture, hunting and forestry	3,327	105	3,432
Fishing	644	0	644
Mining and quarrying	1,164	0	1,164
Manufacturing	39,082	174	39,256
Electricity, gas and water supply	4,891	0	4,891
Construction	11,056	348	11,404
Wholesale and retail trade	56,491	1,482	57,973
Hotels and restaurants	10,085	0	10,085
Transport, storage and communication	17,809	522	18,331
Financial intermediation	31,458	348	31,806
Real estate, renting and business activities	90,241	264	90,505
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	71,630	174	71,804
Education	182,080	0	182,080
Health and social work	57,746	270	58,016
Other community, social and personal service activities	14,772	0	14,772
Private households with employed persons	6,948	0	6,948
Extra-territorial organisations and bodies	0	0	0
TOTAL	599,425	3,686	603,111

Source: Eurostat: Labour Force Survey, 2000

As Table 3.7 shows, most university graduates are employed in education (as primary and secondary teachers) and in various business activities (90.505). Public administration and defence were considered to be very attractive areas for employment with approximately 72.000 graduates applying for a job in these fields. Other popular occupations for graduates were found in health and social services sectors as well as the wholesale and trade sector.

Finally, with regards to graduate recruitment and selection strategies it is fair to say that in the Greek graduate labour market graduate supply exceeds demand. Papakonstantinou's research has shown that only 15 per cent of employed graduates have gained their position through objective (based on qualification and social criteria such as social and financial background etc) selection, the rest having resorted to personal connections (Papakonstantinou, 1996). More specifically, a continuous rise in unemployment leading to intense competition for a position, generates the need for further qualifications, but also seems to favour the adoption of indirect means of employment. As Patiniotis (1993) notes, this phenomenon emerged in the nineteenth century as a result of unsuccessful employment policies. As a result, many job seekers had to rely on political parties so as to secure a job, offered especially in the public sector as a return for political support. Therefore, it is not surprising that political favouritism and family connections have been considered as the most distinguishing characteristics of graduate recruitment and selection policies in both Greek public and private sectors.

3.4 Summary

This chapter provided an overview on the Greek HE system, labour market participation and employment. As Patiniotis (2000) observes, the demand of the Greek population for HE (mainly due to the need for social and financial mobility) put pressure for 'freer' access to

universities and other institutes of HE. But, since HE places were historically limited, Greece has experienced a situation where 'demand' exceeded 'supply'. Although this imbalance was and still is controlled by the National Examinations system, which, until 2000, determined the number of enrolments within academic departments, there are still weak links between the academic establishment and the operation of the labour market. This is due to the fact that Greek businesses are unable to absorb the increasing number of graduates entering the labour market. The outcome of this situation is an increasing level of unemployment amongst HE graduates. Based on the above, it is very difficult to have an accurate picture of graduate employment and unemployment in the country. Changes in the demand for and supply of labour may have effects on the official employment and unemployment figures.

Overall, what seems to be the case is that many HE graduates are forced to look for employment in different fields to their degree studies. The phenomenon of over-education and hetero-employment is more intense in theoretical degree disciplines graduates compared to vocational and more specialised degree programmes graduates. Based on this issue a key concern of the following empirical chapters presented in this thesis, is to examine degree choices, skills acquisition and graduate career progression amongst two groups of graduates from different disciplines: political science & public administration and nursing.

Chapter Four

Degree Choices and Career Activities after Graduation: Survey Evidence amongst Graduates from Nursing and PSc & PA

4.1 Introduction.

This chapter examines the choices of individuals before undertaking and after completing a degree, with specific focus on their career progression. It draws upon the findings of a questionnaire survey of a sample of political science and public administration (PSc & PA) and nursing graduates in the Attica region¹ of Greece. The survey seeks to identify how the initial decisions behind their degree choice and the outcome of the degree studies shape their career choices. It also outlines graduates post degree decisions and career activities. In this regard, a key concern of the chapter is to assess the extent to which various factors influence the graduate employment in Greece. The chapter begins by setting out the survey, decisions around sampling and the response rate. Section 4.3 focuses on the results of nursing graduates, whilst Section 4.4 presents the findings from PSc & PA degree graduates. For both sub-samples, our analysis considers: degree choices after completion of secondary education; respondents' activities after graduation; and, workplace training and unemployment amongst graduates. Finally, this chapter ends with a discussion of the findings and a conclusion.

¹ As it was stated in Chapter Two, the choice of the above disciplines is based on their balance of supply and demand in the labour market. According to Katsanevas (2002), political sciences and public administration are important university level studies which at present are over-populated. Therefore, the job opportunities in their area of studies, are limited. In contrast, nursing studies in Greece present a very positive balance.

4.2 Questionnaire response.

Two hundred and forty graduates were surveyed five years after graduation obtaining information on their education background, career paths and the current working situation. With regards to education, every period of further education (first degree, second degree, master, Ph.D.) undertaken by the respondent was recorded, whether or not it had been completed. Every period of employment, unemployment or inactivity was also recorded. By recording all these data for education and work, the survey attempts to build up a complete record of activities for each individual in the sample since graduation. Two different kinds of sampling method were used to generate data. As far as nursing graduates are concerned, the sample was largely selected from their current place of work. In the case of PSc & PA graduates the sample was largely selected from their place of graduation. The above sampling methods were selected, as these were the only feasible ways to collect information. Difficulties in obtaining the co-operation of the administrative staff of the academic institutions or accessing career centers' files meant that the sampling approach adopted varied for the two disciplines.

For nursing graduates, access to two hospitals was obtained, one public and one private. In the public hospital, 40 questionnaires were distributed to the graduate nurses and the maximum number of responses was obtained (100 per cent response rate). In the private hospital, 50 questionnaires were distributed and 20 of them were returned (40 per cent response rate). Also, 3 questionnaires were administered personally to graduates. Finally, 23 nursing graduates were also contacted through a job agency, and 7 of them completed the questionnaire (30 per cent response rate).

For the PSc & PA graduates in the University of Athens, 58 out of the 100 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 58 per cent. In addition, 32 out of 100 were returned from graduates of the department of political science in Pantion University. 50 questionnaires were distributed personally to graduates from this discipline, of which 30 valid questionnaires were received, a response rate of 60.3 per cent. Finally 115 PSc & PA graduates were conducted by phone (with the support of a job agency), which generated 50 valid responses, a response rate of 43.5 per cent. The overall distribution and response rate from these methods is summarised in Table 4.1 below. Overall, the response rate was 60 per cent for nursing and 46.6 per cent for PSc & PA graduates.

Table 4.1: *Distribution of the graduate questionnaires*

	Number of questionnaires distributed	Number Returned	Response rate for the sub-sample
Nursing	40	40	100
<i>Public Hospital</i>	50	20	40
<i>Private Hospital</i>	3	3	100
<i>Self- Administration of the questionnaires</i>	23	7	30
<i>Job Agency</i>	116	70	60.3
TOTAL			
Political Science & Public Administration:			
	100	58	58
<i>Political Science & Public Administration -Athens University</i>	100	32	32
<i>Political Science & Public Administration -Pantion University</i>	50	30	60
<i>Self- administration of the questionnaires</i>	115	50	43.5
<i>Job Agency</i>	365	170	46.6
TOTAL			

4.3 Nursing graduates.

4.3.1 First degree choice: Influencing factors and qualifications / skills obtained from the nursing degree

In this section the factors that influenced the respondents' choice of a first degree study in nursing, as well as the skills / qualifications obtained by nursing degree, are examined. In general, the move from education to work can be particularly difficult for youngsters with no career orientation and work experience (Ministry of Education, 2000). As the results show there are a series of inter-linked and interacting factors that influenced respondents' initial decision to study for a degree.

Table 4.2: *Factors influencing the decision to study for a degree amongst nursing graduates*

Factors	Percentage				
	Not at all	Little	Moderate	Large	Very large
Family influence	7.1	10	10	42.9	30
Social status	5.7	12.9	35.7	41.4	4.3
Respectable income	-	11.4	27.1	32.9	28.6
Career prospects	21.4	17.2	18.6	31.4	11.4
Job mobility/ flexibility	14.3	17.1	24.3	35.7	8.6

Table 4.2 shows that from all the factors influencing the initial course of action for students seeking to study for a degree, family influence was the most important one—approximately 73 per cent stated that this had a very large influence. The next most influential factor was the aspiration to attain a respectable income (seen as having large / a very large influence by 61.5 per cent). Other factors of lesser importance in influencing the decision to study for a degree were: the social status attached to obtaining a degree award (just 45.7 per cent of the respondents saw this as having large / a very large influence), job flexibility (44.3 per cent) and career progression (42.8 per cent).

Apart from reasons for studying in higher education, respondents were also asked to consider the factors that influenced their initial decision to study for a nursing degree. As Table 4.3 indicates, just over two-thirds (68.6 per cent) reported that the result of the national examination process had a high level of influence on their decision to enter into nursing (it is interesting to note that 71.4 per cent of the respondents had enrolled in nursing after their second or third attempt in the national examination). Personal interests and inclinations were also seen as having large / very large influence by 48.6 per cent. Comments added by individuals on the questionnaire suggested that they chose nursing because they believed that their caring and people skills would be of value in a social and caring profession. Professional orientation modules within school classes (Ministry of Education, 2002) emphasise that, medicine and medical associated professions are prestigious areas of employment with excellent career prospects and social status. However, our research suggests that teachers or career advisors influenced relatively few respondents. Noticeably, only one third of respondents reported that they were influenced by school and career teachers (32.9 per cent). This is in accordance with Katsanevas' study (2000), which reports that even graduates who have studied in professions that fall in the same occupational group (i.e. medicine or medical association professions) have different job opportunities and career progression in the labour market. In other words, the choice of a medical degree is not a guarantee for a professional career in this field. Accordingly, over one third of the respondents reported that current market trends did not influence their choice of studying for a nursing degree. In addition, as Table 4.3 shows, another factor which was taken into consideration was the influence of relatives and friends who studied / worked in a related professional field (40 per cent).

Table 4.3: *Factors influencing the choice of the degree studied amongst nurses*

Factors	Percentage				
	Not at all	Little	Moderate	Large	Very Large
Outcome of the national examinations	20	5.7	5.7	8.6	60
Personal interests and inclinations	22.9	20	8.5	30	18.6
Influence from school/ career teachers	32.9	21.4	12.8	24.3	8.6
Relatives and others who have studied/ work in a similar field	21.4	21.4	17.2	25.7	14.3
Relatives and others regardless their studies/ work	40	17.1	12.9	21.4	8.6
Current labour market trends	32.9	21.4	18.6	27.1	-

n=70 for each response

Having identified the various factors that influenced the choice of the academic discipline, it is now appropriate to explore what skills and abilities respondents felt they had acquired during their nursing studies. This question examined the viewpoints of the nursing graduates regarding the value of their degree studies, that is, the extent to which they considered that some degree skills and competencies could be utilised in their work settings. The majority of nursing graduates felt that they had received professional / technical skills as well theoretical knowledge from their studies (97.1 percent and 90 per cent respectively). One explanation for this is the fact that the majority of the nursing graduates of our sample (94.3 percent) were graduates from technological institutions (67 out of 70 respondents) who undertook a compulsory six months work internship as part of their studies. Therefore, the percentage of people stated as having technical and theoretical skills is in accordance with the type of internship undertaken by the respondents, which was in caring settings such as hospitals (66 out of the 70 respondents). Likewise, eight out of every ten of respondents answered that they had obtained caring skills during their studies. However, it is noticeable that our respondents also reported that, as far as they were concerned, their studies had provided them with few transferable skills. In total, just

over one third of the respondents stated that they were able to demonstrate team working skills, 28.6 per cent IT skills, 22.9 per cent presentation skills and, finally, only 15.7 per cent felt that they had developed writing skills.

Table 4.4: *Skills/competencies obtained from the nursing degree*

Skills/qualifications	Percentage*
Practical skills	97.1
Theoretical knowledge	90
Caring skills	80
Team working	34.3
IT skills	28.6
Presentation skills	22.9
Analytical skills	18.6
Writing projects/ reports	15.7

n=70 (Respondents could give more than one answer)

In summary, nursing graduates seemed to attain the required skills that would make them attractive in nursing and other health related occupations but there is little evidence to show whether the same group of respondents seemed to feel confident of their generic skills obtained from their degree studies.

The next subsection deals with nursing graduates' post degree activities and perceptions on them.

4.3.2. Activities after graduating from nursing.

This section compares and contrasts responses from the graduates' progression in terms of the jobs they acquired and the utilisation of skills and knowledge obtained from their degree studies. Examining the activities undertaken by the sample after completing their first degree in nursing, Table 4.5 shows that some or all of the categories (students, currently employed etc) overlap. This is because respondents

were allowed to select more than one category, to reflect the fact that they may have been engaged in multiple activities since graduation. As the table reveals, nearly nine out of ten respondents were currently employed, whilst 11.4 per cent were unemployed at the time of the research (although had previously been in employment). In addition, one fifth of the sample (20 per cent) had studied for an additional degree. These responses are not, however, suggestive of a fixed trajectory since graduation, as respondents were invited to select more than one category.

Table 4.5: *Activities after graduating from nursing*

	n of respondents	% of respondents
Student	14	20
Currently employed	62	88.6
Employed in the past and unemployed at present	8	11.4
Unemployed	-	-
Military service	11	15.7

n=70 (respondents could select more than one answers)

In the following sections we examine further the career decision to go into postgraduate employment, receive further knowledge or training or to obtain work experience immediately after graduation. One theme that emerges strongly is the disparity in opportunities and resources between those embarking on different career paths after graduation. For example, the length of time between completion of first-degree studies and finding a job is not necessarily a period of unemployment. There are many reasons for which a graduate may be out of the labour market for some period of time, instead of seeking employment.

For example, one important issue, which applies to both disciplines, is military service, which is currently compulsory only for the male population. As male

respondents commented, military service used to vary from 18 to 22 months depending on the force the cadet joined (18 months for army force, 20 for air force and 22 for navy). However, since January 2003, service has been reduced to 12 months. Males can join the army any time after their eighteenth birthday. That also coincides with the completion of their secondary school studies. Military service can be put off in order to undertake further studies. What is usually the case is that males join the army after graduation. As a result, there is a time gap between graduation and seeking employment. Moreover, the average age at which a male seeks employment is higher than that of female graduates. From the nursing graduates, more than a quarter of the respondents stated that they had undertaken military service.

Consequently, the analysis of the following subsections is very important because it reveals the personal, social, political and economic influences that shape the career decisions of respondents after graduating from nursing.

4.3.2.1 Further studies

The perceived lack of transferable skills in nursing studies was an influential factor in some nursing graduates' decision to continue for further studies. As the findings show, nursing graduates seek further studies in subjects both directly related and unrelated to their first degree. As Table 4.6 illustrates, out of the 14 nursing graduates who had decided to continue their studies, 64.3 per cent undertook a second undergraduate degree, 28.6 per cent a Masters degree and finally 7.1 per cent a Ph.D.

Table 4.6: *Further studies for nursing graduates*

	n of respondents	% of respondents
Second Degree	9	64.3
Master Degree	4	28.6
Second Master Degree	-	-
Doctoral Degree	1	7.1

n=14

Of the 14 nursing graduates who had continued their studies, 14.3 per cent had undertaken a degree in the same area and 85.7 per cent in a different area. Of those respondents who were in the same area, the most reported reason for undertaking a further degree in the same subject was the potential of finding a stable and permanent job. This was related to their desire to be employed in the general public sector as permanent public servants (50 per cent). In addition, the same percentage of respondents decided to continue their studies at a postgraduate level because they had already studied in the same department and they were familiar with the teaching staff, the programme and the facilities that their department could offer. Half of the respondents commented that they continued their studies at a postgraduate level because they were currently employed, and that a Masters degree would enhance their career prospects and increase their income.

Amongst those that decided to study in a different area, a considerable proportion (75 per cent) reported that they were not satisfied with their professional development as nurses. According to them, the most important reasons for continuing in a different area of study were: limited job opportunities (75 per cent); and their career progression as nurses (50 per cent). As most of them had decided to enrol in nursing as a result of their national exams, they felt that they had “struggled” in the nursing profession. Therefore, half of the respondents in this sub-sample made the decision to

study for a second degree or Masters degree in another scientific area related to their interests and inclinations (50 percent). The respondents reported that if they followed further studies in a different scientific area, they would be able to obtain professional flexibility and better financial prospects (33.3 per cent).

4.3.2.2 Nursing graduates currently in employment

In general, graduates from different degree disciplines have different professional opportunities in the labour market. As Katsanevas (2002) notes, the broader sector of nursing and caring professions employs a significant number of people that, according to his results, is likely to increase in the future. This must be related to institutional factors that may be leading to more jobs in the capital city (i.e. more hospital and health services, more specialisations etc). Thus, most of our nursing graduates chose to go straight into the nursing profession (83.9 per cent). Of those that did not, 6.5 per cent were currently senior officials in national and local government, and 3.2 percent were secretaries, receptionists and typists. The findings also show individual cases of graduate respondents who were currently employed in sales, clerical and customer care occupations.

Table 4.7: *Current employment status of nursing graduates*

	n of respondents	% of respondents
Senior officials in national and local government	1	1.6
Health and social services managers	4	6.5
Nurses and therapists	52	83.9
Sales representatives	1	1.6
Account clerks	1	1.6
Secretaries, receptionists and typists	2	3.2
Customer care occupations	1	1.6

n=62

In order to probe in more detail the employment situation of nursing graduates, the questionnaire asked a number of questions relating to the sector in which they were employed (public or private), the kind of employment, the number of different jobs they had undertaken so far, the recruitment methods they used to find work, workplace training and perceptions of training

Of all employed nursing respondents, 60 per cent were working in the public sector, whilst the remaining 40 per cent had worked in the private sector. Of those working in the public sector, 73.8 per cent had a permanent job; 17.6 per cent were engaged in contracting work and only 8.6 per cent held a fixed-term job. Of those employed in the private sector, more than 8 out of ten were undertaking contract work, whilst 12.8 per cent had a permanent contract. Finally, only 6.4 per cent of the respondents employed in the private sector had fixed-terms positions (see Table 4.8). In summary, it seems that respondents employed in the public sector were more likely to have permanent contracts, whilst respondents employed in private sector positions were more likely to be engaged in contract work.

Table 4.8: *Type of sector and contracting arrangement amongst employed nursing graduates*

Type of work	Contract			% respondents	n respondents
	Fixed-term work	Contracting work	Permanent work		
Private Sector	6.4	80.8	12.8	40	25
Public Sector	8.6	17.6	73.8	60	37

n=62

In addition, it is worth examining the relationship between gender and type of work (Table 4.9). Looking at the distribution of jobs between males and females, a noticeably higher proportion of women were nurses (9 out of 10 respondents) than

men working in the same profession (almost 6 out of 10 respondents). The opposite appears to be the case with managerial positions in Health and Social Services, where a higher proportion of men when compared to women, can be found (21.4 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively). A higher proportion of males can also be found working as senior officials in national and local government. As Table 4.9 shows, the rest of the male sample was currently working in auxiliary positions, such as sales (7.1 per cent) and accounts clerk (7.1 per cent). A higher proportion of females can be found in secretarial, receptionist and customer service positions (2.1 and 4.2 per cent respectively).

Table 4.9: *Current employment status and gender between graduate nurses*

Employment Status	Gender	
	Male %	Female %
Senior Officials in National and Local Government	7.1	-
Health and Social Service Managers	21.4	2.1
Nurses and Therapists	57.1	91.6
Sales Representatives	7.1	-
Accounts Clerks	7.1	-
Secretaries, Receptionists and Typists	-	4.2
Customer Care Occupations	-	2.1
	n=14	n=48

Comparing the two tables described above (4.8 and 4.9), it is fair to say that women were more likely than men to be found in public sector undertaking the nursing occupation and having a permanent contract. These findings come in accordance with Serafetinides (2001) study which reveals that historically in Greece public sector jobs were considered to be the ideal destination for women mainly because of the permanency and benefits offered to them (i.e. less hours of work compared to private sector jobs, paid maternity leave, childcare and benefits for dependants). As a result, women employed in the public sector have come to a point where they place equal

emphasis on having a family and a career. With regards to male respondents, the fact that many of them were found in senior and managerial positions, has been commented by Symeonidou (1995). According to her, this phenomenon was partly related to socio-economic factors influencing career choices and motives related to utilitarian incentives (become rich, acquire authority etc.), since the principal roles of man in his family is that of 'protector' and 'provider' (ibid: 12).

Turning to the methods used by respondents to find their current job, Table 4.10 reveals that the only way to find employment in public hospitals and other public health associated organisations was through participation in public sector competitions for public servants positions available (77.4 per cent of their responses). Those nursing graduates that found employment in private hospitals reported using newspaper advertisements as the main technique in their job hunting (more than one third of the replies). Noticeably, informal recruitment methods such as personal connections were very popular among a considerable number of nursing respondents (62.9 per cent of the nurses and all Senior Officials in national and local government, Health and Social Service Managers and Sales Representatives). As they commented, compared to formal methods, informal contacts are a better channel to transmit information between job applicants and potential employers. Indeed, as Yfantopoulos and Pollysos (2000) suggest, informal recruitment methods such as social networking or internal recruitment are very 'popular' in a national context, usually used by graduate nurses and associated medical professionals. Turning to our sample, 32.3 per cent of the respondents who were employed as nurses stated that they used their family and friends' network in order to find employment in local hospitals or other 'targeted' organisations.

Table 4.10: *Recruitment techniques for graduate nurses by occupation*

	% citing a particular method							
	Newspaper Advertisements	Participation in Public Sector Competition	Local Companies	Recruitment Agencies	Internet	Career Fairs/Milkrounds	Personal Contacts	n of respondents
Senior officials in national and local government	100	-	-	-	100	-	100	1
Health and social services managers	25	4.8	-	-	1.6	-	6.5	4
Nurses and therapists	35.5	77.4	32.3	-	8.6	-	62.9	52
Sales representatives	100	-	-	-	-	-	1.6	1
Account clerks	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Secretaries, receptionists and typists	-	-	1.6	-	-	-	-	2
Customer care occupations	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
% of the sample	65.8	21.8	18.9	-	15.7		24.4	62

Respondents could give more than one answers

In summary, graduate nurses utilised their personal contacts to find a job in an area related to their studies or searched in the newspaper advertisements for vacant positions in private hospitals. It was argued that a lot of the observed variation in recruitment techniques used by graduates in their job hunting could be explained by variation in recruitment policies. In deciding their investment in recruitment, public sector organizations and big hospitals trade off the costs of a more intensive screening with the benefits of a more accurately selected workforce through an assessment of their formal qualifications. Sometimes the Greek State establishes social criteria as a screening device for selection (such as priority for single parents, dependents, disabled or underwaged people etc). This decision is obviously affected by the prevailing labour market conditions and is supposedly a very important factor in determining the ability of each organization (public or private) in selecting workers through formal recruitment methods relative to informal ones. As the next section shows, the nature of Greek organisations also prevents -especially small and family

firms- from investing not only in the recruitment and selection methods but also in the training and consequently career development of their employees. As a result, a discrimination against graduates' potentials, competencies or attributes exists in the workplace.

4.3.2.3: Perceptions on the value of the degree studies and workplace training for nursing graduates.

All the respondents were asked to evaluate the relevance of the work type to their degree studies. The key concern of this question was to explore graduates' perceptions on the value of their degree studies within their work settings. The findings reveal that graduates' perceptions about the value of their degree studies and their competencies and attributes were subjected to the job they were undertaking at the time of the research. In general, almost all the sample that was working as nurses and as health and social services managers felt that their degree studies corresponded to their current job (98.3 per cent). However, none of the respondents who worked in other occupations stated that their current job was related to their degree studies.

According to Patiniotis and Stavroulakis (1997), graduates' development also depends on the training experience gained within a workplace. In this regard, respondents were asked a series of questions about their training experiences with their current employers / organisations. Table 4.11 below shows the percentage of the total sample that had received a particular type of training. In general, as the findings show, on-the-job training was the most common kind of training received by respondents.

Table 4.11: *Training received from current employers by occupation
(% citing their particular reasons- nursing respondents)*

	On-The-Job Training	Graduate Programme	Seminars	Projects	n of respondents
Senior officials in national and local government	100	100	-	100	1
Health and social services managers	25	50	5	25	4
Nurses and therapists	74.2	8.1	32.3	1.6	52
Sales representatives	100	-	1.6	-	1
Account clerks	100	-	-	-	1
Secretaries, receptionists and typists	100	-	-	-	2
Customer care occupations	-	-	-	-	1
% of the sample	71.3	22.6	12	18.1	62

Respondents could give more than one answers

As Table 4.11 shows, most of the nursing graduates received on the job training (74.2 per cent), whilst only 32.3 per cent reported that they had received training through seminars. Following the above discussion it is fair to say that the phenomenon of 'on-the-job training' in the workplace, is particularly common amongst public sector organisations as well as small and medium size Greek firms where limited resources in training provisions restrain employers from investing time and resources for their employees' development (Bourantas, 1990). Indeed, from graduates' responses it is obvious that on the job training was very popular among people undertaking administrative occupations, sales as well as account clerks. As they commented, the tasks that they perform in their current jobs were very easy to learn on-the job and there was not any reason for further training. In the case of the sale representative occupation, seminars were also very important within his workplace. As the respondents reported, their current job required knowledge of their products, and targeted market as well as development of generic competencies and skills through seminars organised by internal or external consultants.

Graduate respondents undertaking a nursing job, or a managerial job in the health sector have been provided not only with on-the-job training but also with other sources of training such as internal and external seminars, graduate programmes, and project work. As they commented, continuous training and life long learning in the health sector was very important, as it helped them practically to apply their qualifications and skills obtained from their degree studies as well as to keep them informed about developments in their area of expertise.

In addition to this, graduates' career development through working experience and provision of training programmes organised by a company cannot be looked at in the isolated arena of the world of work; other factors contribute. Factors external to the workplace, such as the role of the family, are particularly important. Taking into account the personal/ domestic commitments of the respondents who were in employment at that time, cross-tabulations reveal a breakdown between type of work and family commitments. As the findings illustrate, the majority of nursing respondents stated that they were married without children (74.2 per cent), while only 14.6 per cent were married with no children. From the remainder, 8 per cent of the working sample was single, and only 3.2 per cent of the respondents reported staying with their partner or being divorced parents.

However, this summary figure reveals little association between marital status and different employment status, as the majority of respondents were working in the nursing profession.

Table 4.12: *Type of Work and Marital Status amongst Nursing Graduates*
(% of respondents)

	Marital Status					n of respondents
	Single	Married With Children	Married without children	Divorced with children	Living with a partner	
Senior Officials in National and Local Government	100	-	-	-	-	1
Health and Social Service Managers	-	100	-	-	-	4
Nurses and Therapists	61.6	34.6		1.9	1.9	52
Sales Representatives	-	100	-	-	-	1
Accounts Clerks	100	-	-	-	-	1
Secretaries, Receptionists and Typists	100	-	-	-	-	2
Customer Care Occupations	100	-	-	-	-	1
% of the sample	65.9	33.5	-	0.3	0.3	62

Our findings indicate that there was an overpopulation of women in nursing compared to men (the ratio in the sample is 5:1). Taking this figure into consideration the following analysis focuses on childcare and benefits as well as training provision amongst female respondents with family commitments. The existence of a wide range of barriers to women's career advancement is a widely noted phenomenon in Greece (Kanellopoulos, 1990). The research findings identified differences between groups of women with different marital status. In particular, the findings revealed that certain groups of females working in nursing seem to have other commitments in addition to their careers. This group consists of married women with dependent children. In our study, attention was given to the women's employment experiences including inadequate social care and insufficient training provision for qualified nurses with family commitments. Comments suggested that the inadequacy of the hospitals to provide childcare provision effectively excludes many women from the upper grades of the nursing profession. More specifically, 83.4 per cent of the female

respondents with family commitments stated that they were not pleased with the benefits and social care they received in their current job, compared to 16.4 per cent of the respondents who replied positively. According to their comments, working hours were the main drawback of the nursing profession. What is the issue here is that many women with dependent children were likely to face difficulties with the management of the hospital because they are unable to make suitable childcare arrangements before and after school hours or during school holidays. Our findings showed that women with family commitments were less available to participate in external events (i.e. training provision outside their working hours) compared to their single counterparts.

As Table 4.13 shows, on-the job training is the most common kind of training used by female respondents who were in employment. 7 out of 10 of the single graduate female nurses claimed that they had received on-the job training while 41.2 per cent of this sub-group attended internal training seminars or a graduate programme (one out of ten of the nursing graduates).

Table 4.13: *Kind of Training and Marital Status amongst Female Nursing Graduates*

Provision of training	Marital status (women %)				n of respondents
	Single	Living with a partner	Married with children	Divorced/ Widowed	
Graduate programme	10	-	-	-	29
Seminars	41.2	-	16.7	-	17
On-the job training	70	100	70.1	100	1
Projects	6.7	-	-	-	1

n=48 Respondents could have more than one type of training

However, the research findings did not fully encapsulate the extent of gender-based disadvantage in nursing in terms of the training opportunities offered by the employers (especially after working times) and the career progression of female graduates with domestic responsibilities. This was because the research sample was quite small. In a more general basis, it is evident that in countries where the man is considered to be the head of the household, i.e. in the strong version of the male breadwinner model, the tax system is based on the household. Tax regimes, which are based on the household rather than on the individual, impose bigger taxes on any second wage than those imposed on the principal wage earner. In discouraging the full-time employment of spouses, these systems also tend to grant subsidies to households where the wives are either totally dependent on their spouse or where their length of work or their income does not exceed a certain threshold. (Women and Employment in the E.U, 1995).

Giving a brief summary of this section it is evident that, in the case of nursing graduates the decision whether or not to study and the degree choice were more influenced by family factors. Taking the vocational nature of the degree studies our findings showed that nursing respondents were likely to be in jobs related to their degree studies. Public sector employment was a lucrative area of employment especially for female respondents with family commitments, where the job is secure, benefits are attractive and career progression is based only on years of experience. Further studies were an option only to a small percentage of respondents who wanted to attain the required skills that would help them change their professional orientation.

4.4 PSc & PA graduates

4.4.1 First degree choice: Influencing factors and qualifications obtained from a PSc & PA degree

We now turn to our sample of PSc & PA graduates. Recent research conducted by the Ministry of Education (2001) has shown that most graduates from theoretical sciences have not often developed a specific career plan after completing secondary education. According to the career guidance book for secondary school students (Ministry of Education, 2001), a career plan needs to be based on an assessment of students' abilities, inclinations and interests and adequate information on labour market trends. In short, it suggests a thoughtful selection of further studies. However, from the results of the survey there is no indication that respondents graduating from PSc & PA have a specific career plan before entering academia. The research findings reveal that the main factors, which influence the decisions of youngsters to study for an academic degree, were: job flexibility (56.5 per cent), career prospects (54.1 per cent) and a respectable income (53.6 per cent). Therefore, there is a big difference between those studying for a nursing degree and PSc & PA graduates: as the decision where to study and the choice of degree are concerned PSc & PA graduates were more influenced by the job while nursing graduates were influenced by family factors.

Table 4.14: *Factors influencing the decision of studying for a degree amongst PSc & PA graduates*

Factors	Percentage				
	Not at all	Little	Moderate	Large	Very large
Family preference	10.6	18.8	29.4	20.6	20.6
Social status	7	21.6	27.2	22.4	21.8
Respectable income	4.7	14.9	26.8	27.4	26.2
Career prospects	3.5	12.5	29.2	28.0	26.8
Job flexibility	1.7	10	31.8	30	26.5

n=170 (respondents could give more than one answers)

In contrast to nursing graduates, respondents from PSc & PA ranked family as the least important factor influencing their initial decision to study for an academic degree (41.8 per cent).

In term of the reasons why respondents chose to study for a PSc & PA degree, two main factors stood out: the outcome of the national examination process; and personal interests and inclinations. Both the political and public administration departments of the Law School of Athens University and Pantion University are very popular departments - considered to be of very respectable status with recognised professors. As Table 4.15 shows, a considerable proportion of respondents (63 per cent) reported that the decision to study for the *specific* degree was based on the national exam results. This was partly due to the university entrance examination system, which offered the chance of three attempts for the candidates to compete for a place in the universities/ technological institutions. Finally, the respondents' decision to study for a degree in PSc & PA was driven by their own personal interests and inclinations (45.8 per cent of the respondents who stated that this factor had a large influence).

Table 4.15: *Factors influencing the choice of the degree studied amongst PSc & PA graduates*

Factors	Percentage				
	Not al all	Little	Moderate	Large	Very Large
Outcome of the national examinations	15.8	7.3	13.9	29.7	33.3
Personal interests and inclinations	9.5	22	22.7	25	20.8
Influence from school/ career teachers	23.2	24.5	33.9	11.3	7.1
Relatives and others who have studied/ work in a similar field	42.8	29.5	19.3	3.6	4.8
Relatives and others regardless their studies/ work	27.1	21.7	24.7	17.5	9
Current labour market trends	18.7	24.1	29.5	21.7	6

n=170 (respondent could give more than one answer)

Examining the distribution of respondents' answers it is evident that more than one third of them stated that the influence by school/ career teachers had only a moderate influence on their initial decision to study for the specific degree. These findings are in accordance with Pationiotis (2000) research that reveals that the career orientation module is failing to provide adequate guidance and information on degree studies and their prospects. This is partly due to the fact that there are few career teachers within the Greek educational system. Also, contrary to nursing graduates, a considerable proportion of PSc & PA graduates stated that their family and relatives had little or no influence at all on their degree decision. This may be due to the general nature of this degree discipline, which does not necessary lead directly to a profession (Katsanevas, 2002). As the findings show, almost one third of the respondents stated that current trends in the labour market had moderate or little influence in their initial degree choice. Therefore, it is very difficult for someone to directly assess its prospects within the Greek labour market and thus it may be the case that families and school environment do not exert a strong influence towards this discipline.

Taking into account the value of a degree in PSc & PA in the labour market, respondents were asked to identify the personal skills and competencies developed during their first-degree studies. For many respondents, their degree was considered to be very generic and theoretical. Therefore, it is not surprising that 91.8 per cent of the respondents claimed that theoretical knowledge was the main outcome of their studies. The ability to research and analyse information from a variety of sources (45.9 per cent) combined with writing (41.8 per cent), presentation (42.4 per cent) and team working skills (44.1 per cent) were also other skills obtained from their degree studies. In contrast to nursing graduates, only one quarter of PSc & PA graduates felt

that their first-degree studies provided them with practical skills. In addition, only 5.6 per cent of the respondents felt that they had acquired IT skills, which were provided by their department.

Table 4.16: *Skills/ competencies obtained from the PSc & PA studies*

Skills	% of respondents
Theoretical knowledge	91.8
Analytical skills	45.9
Team working	44.1
Presentation skills	42.4
Writing projects/ reports	41.8
Practical skills	25.3
IT skills	5.6

n=170 (Respondents could give more than one answer)

In summary, PA & PSc graduates seemed to attain some generic skills as well as theoretical knowledge in their area of studies. However, there is limited past research on whether the same group of respondents felt confident for the extent to which their attained degree skills were attractive to their potential employers. Based on this issue, the next subsection deals with PSc & PA graduates' post degree activities and perceptions.

4.4.2 Activities after graduating from PSc & PA

In this section, the activities of our respondents after completing their first degree in PSc & PA are examined. The choice of and success within these activities are determined in part by the aptitudes, interests, values, needs, prior experiences and expectations of the graduates.

Turning to our sample, Table 4.17 shows that some or all of the categories (students, currently employed etc) overlap. This means that the respondents were allowed to select more than one category that applied to them after graduation. As the table reveals, most of the respondents were currently employed at the time of the research (85.3 per cent) and 10.1 per cent were previously employed but unemployed at the time of the survey. Only 4.6 per cent of the respondent stated that they did not have work experience at all. Over 4 out of 10 of the respondents stated that they had studied for a further degree whilst, almost one third of them was engaged in military service.

Table 4.17: *Activities after graduating from PSc & PA*

	n of respondents	% of respondents
Student	72	42.4
Currently employed	145	85.3
Employed in the past and unemployed at present	17	10.1
Unemployed	8	4.6
Military service	50	29.4

n=170 (Respondents could give more than one answer)

Unlike the nursing graduates some respondents of PSc & PA science reported unemployed or that, they were employed in the past and were unemployed at the time of the research: 4.6 and 10.1 per cent of the total sample. The latter group of respondents felt that there had not been any professional progression in the jobs they had undertaken so far. As they commented, their unemployment situation should not be considered as an inactivity period, but as an 'available time' searching for their desirable job, involving in atypical forms of employment or/and not declaring officially income (more discussion about this issue is presented in Chapter Six).

Each of the other graduates activities are examined in terms of graduates' decision to go into further studies to acquire further knowledge or training, or to obtain work experience immediately after graduation.

4.4.2.1: Further Studies

Our research findings show that graduates seek further studies both directly related and unrelated to their first degree. As Table 4.18 demonstrates, more than four out of every ten respondents had undertaken additional study after completing their first degree. Of those respondents who had undertaken further studies, 71.6 per cent were awarded a masters degree, almost 15 per cent undertook doctoral study, 9 per cent a second undergraduate degree and 2.8 per cent studied for a second masters degree. Nearly three quarters of these respondents (71 percent) chose to undertake their further studies in a different subject area to their first degree.

Table 4.18: *Further studies for PSc & PA graduates*

	Respondents	Percentage
Second Degree	9	8.8
Master Degree	73	71.6
Second Master Degree	5	4.9
Doctoral Degree	15	14.7

n=102 (respondents could select more than one answer)

There are two main reasons why PSc & PA graduates chose to continue their studies at a postgraduate level in a different scientific area, the first being to specialise in an area of particular interest. Up until recently PSc & PA graduates tended to specialise in an area related to their first-degree subject (Katsanevas, 2000). However, the findings reveal that this is no longer the case. As already mentioned, the PSc & PA

degree seems to be of a highly generic nature and it does not lead directly to a profession (Katsanevas, 2002). Moreover, even though the number of graduates in this discipline has increased, the employers' demand for graduates from this discipline has not increased in a proportional way. In other words, supply exceeds demand. Backing this up, a number of respondents who had studied in a different area did so because they felt that their career opportunities were limited (half of respondents' replies). A considerable number of respondents reported that postgraduate study was a path through which graduates were able to obtain more transferable skills and knowledge making it easier to adapt to the current working environment (45.8 per cent). In other words, it is fair to say that postgraduate studies were perceived as a means to compensate for lacking practical skills or to attain generic skills that would make them attractive in the labour market. Indeed, the other reason why graduates chose to continue their studies in a different study area was to improve their job prospects once they joined the labour market (40.3 per cent).

Table 4.19: *Reasons for undertaking an additional degree in a different subject area*

	% of respondents
Difficulty in finding a job	50
Job prospects	40.3
Financial security	25
Professional flexibility	45.8
Job security	29.2
Personal interests and inclinations	40.3

n=72 (respondents could select more than one answers)

Of respondents who decided for further studies in the same area, 90 per cent felt that a master degree would enhance their possibilities of finding a 'good' job. Examining some other reasons for undertaking a degree in the same subject area, it is noticeable that the most important were the connections with the university (9 out of every 10 of

the respondents) and, secondly, the better financial prospects due to a master degree in this field (93.3 per cent). Additionally, some respondents noted that a further degree would improve their career prospects (76.7 per cent) as well as enhance their opportunities to secure employment (63.3 per cent).

Table 4.20: *Reasons for undertaking an additional degree in the same subject area*

	% of respondents
Easy to find a job	90
Job prospects	76.7
Financial security	93.3
Connections with the university	90
Job security	63.3
Personal interests and inclinations	30

n=30

4.4.2.2: PSc & Pa graduates currently in employment

As research by Katsanevas (2000) has demonstrated, the supply of students graduating from theoretical studies such as sociology and PSc & PA is higher than the demand for related professions in the labour market. This is because of the increasing number of people graduating from these disciplines. Consequently, while the present study asked respondents to indicate whether they found a job related to their degree discipline, a significant proportion of the total sample gave a negative answer (79.3 per cent). Indeed, as Table 4.21 shows, 40.7 per cent of the PSc & PA graduates were employed in administrative and secretarial positions whilst more than a quarter of them were managers and senior officials. Of the remainder, 13.8 per cent were engaged in associate professional and technical occupations, 11 per cent in sales and customer care occupations and only 7.6 per cent in professional occupations.

Table 4.21: *Current employment status amongst PSc & PA graduates*

Type of work	n of respondents	% of respondents
Managers and Senior Officials	39	26.9
Professional occupations	11	7.6
Associate professional and technical occupations	20	13.8
Administrative and secretarial occupations	59	40.7
Sales and customer care occupations	16	11

n=145

In order to probe into the issue of the employment of respondents graduating from PSc & PA departments, the questionnaire asked a number of questions relating to the sector and kind of employment they were employed in, number of different jobs undertaken to date, recruitment methods, perceptions of training provision and differences amongst different groups. Compared to nursing graduates, it is evident that nine out of ten PSc & PA graduates have found work in the private sector. Of those respondents employed in the public sector more than half had a permanent job and 46.2 per cent contract work. In contrast, the majority of the respondents employed in the private sector were engaged in contracting work (more than four out of ten of the respondents), 12.9 per cent had a fixed-term work and only 5.3 per cent a permanent job. The distribution and breakdown of the responses is detailed in Table 4.22.

Table 4.22: *Type of sector and contracting arrangements amongst employed PSc & PA graduates (%)*

Type of work	Contract			% respondents	n respondents
	Fixed-term work	Contracting work	Permanent work		
Private Sector	12.9	81.8	5.3	91	132
Public Sector	-	46.2	53.8	9	13

n=145

In addition, examining the distribution of jobs between males and females, it is fair to say that, overall, the findings show that both genders are well presented in occupations which are not directly related to their first-degree studies. Table 4.23 shows that a higher proportion of women than men were working in sales and customer care occupations (23.6 per cent and 8.4 per cent respectively). In secretarial and administrative positions there also was a proportionally higher representation of women compared to men (48 per cent and 34.9 per cent respectively). Men outnumbered women in managerial (33.3 per cent compared to 21.2 per cent of female respondents), professional (10 per cent of males and 6 of female respondents) and associated and technical occupations (the ratio between male and female respondents was more 10:1).

Table 4.23: *Current employment status and gender among PSc & PA graduates*

Type of work	Gender	
	Male	Female
Managers and Senior Officials	33.3	21.2
Professional occupations	10	6
Associate professional and technical occupations	13.4	1.2
Administrative and secretarial occupations	34.9	48
Sales and customer care occupations	8.4	23.6
	n=60	n=85

Turning to the methods respondents used to find their current job our findings showed that, respondents employed in different occupations appear to rely on different job search techniques. The most popular recruitment methods used by graduates in PSc & PA were the use of personal contacts, job advertisements as well as on-line recruitment. It was argued that a lot of the observed variation in recruitment techniques used by graduates in their job hunting could be explained by the variation

in recruitment policies. Indeed, contrary to the nursing occupation, on-line recruitment was very popular in managerial and sales occupations in which a considerable level of IT knowledge is required. On line recruitment as well as personal connections and job advertisements were widely used among sales and customer occupations. Personal connections and on line job hunting were frequently used amongst associate professional and technical occupations. Of respondents in administrative and secretarial occupations personal connections were also of value in their job hunting (74 per cent). As Table 4.24 shows, newspaper advertisements were among the most preferred job-hunting techniques for more than half of the respondents who were in employment at that time of the study (56.6 per cent). Moreover, a considerable proportion of the respondents participated in public sector competitions for economic and public administration positions (34.9 per cent). In addition, contrary to the nursing population, over one third of the PSc & PA graduates, used recruitment agencies as one of the main sources in their search for their desirable job.

Table 4.24: *Recruitment Techniques for PSc & PA Graduates*

	% citing a particular method							n of respondents
	Newspaper Advertisements	Participation in Public Sector Competition	Recruitment Agencies	Local Companies	Internet	Career Fairs/Milkrounds	Personal Contacts	
Managers and Seniors Officials	43.5	22.4	52.6	-	66.2	20.8	69.7	43.5
Professional Occupations	34.8	40	38.3	-	56.7	33.3	65	34.8
Associate professional and technical occupations	55.7	55.8	37.1	-	78.9	17.8	100	55.7
Administrative and secretarial occupations	58.5	34.8	24.1	-	21.3	8.7	74	58.5
Sales and customer service occupations	90	21.7	43.4	-	82.5	50	78.3	90
% of the sample	56.5	34.9	39.1	-	61.1	26.1	77.4	56.5

n=145 (Respondents could give more than one answer)

In summary, PSc & PA graduates seem to use a wider variety of recruitment techniques compared to their nursing counterparts. This is because the sample was more heterogeneous in terms of their occupational activity. Therefore, different employers prefer different recruitment techniques according to the nature of the vacant job they would like to fill in. The fact that PSc & PA graduates made limited use of the career fair/ milkgrounds reveals the fact that either graduate opportunities in their area of studies are very few, or graduates feel that there is no correspondence between their studies and their attained skills and the available graduate jobs in the career fairs. Based on the latter issue, the next subsection deals with graduate perceptions on the value of their degree studies and workplace training.

4.4.2.3 Perceptions on the value of the degree studies, and workplace training for PSc & PA graduates

All the respondents were asked to evaluate the relevance of the work type to their degree studies. While the majority of nursing graduates felt that there was correspondence between their degree studies and their current job, a significant proportion of the PSc & PA respondents, just over two thirds, reported that their degree studies had little or no relevance to their current job. Noticeably, more than 6 out of ten of the respondents felt that there was little or no correspondence between their current job duties with their degree skills and qualifications. Of the remainder, only a quarter stated that there was large relevance between their degree skills and qualifications in their current job. The proportion of the sample who felt that their degree studies were utilised in their work settings were mostly public servants in various positions in the national and local government, such as senior officials and administrative officers. However, there is not enough evidence to support this view. This is because the ratio of the respondents working in the public sector to the private

one is 1:10. In general, these findings are in line with the research of Bourantas *et al.* (1990), which demonstrated that high competition and political favouritism are the main reasons for the fewer people employed in public services in Greece. In more detail, the public sector has traditionally been a lucrative area of employment, as it offers permanent employment with career progression based only on the years of experience.

The extent to which PSc & PA graduates felt that training provision was also essential for their career progression was dependant on the sector in which they were employed and the kind of job.

One of the main features emerging from our research in Greece was the strong belief, of almost all respondents, in the value of training in their career development within an organisation. Based on this issue, respondents were asked a series of questions about the training provided by their current employers / organisations. Comments made by graduates of this disciplines reveal that most of their companies in Greece were small or family-owned firms with low task jobs which can be practically conducted by any experienced employee. Therefore, it is not surprising that 63.7 per cent of the respondents stated that they received on the job training. Seminars were also of value to more than one third of the respondents. Project training had been provided to 22.9 per cent of the respondents and, finally, a significant minority of the total sample (only 6.8 per cent) stated that they had attended a graduate programme. According to Patiniotis (2000), there is a tendency in Greece among small and medium size firms to provide on-the-job training and in some cases (i.e. new computer software, or sales techniques) internal or external seminars. Sophisticated

training programmes provided inclusively to graduates' development are very costly and therefore, only large Greek and multinational companies can afford their cost.

Table 4.25: *Training received from current employers by occupation*
(% citing their particular reasons- PSc & PA respondents)

	On-the-job training	Graduate programme	Seminars	Projects	n of respondents
Managers and Senior Officials	49.5	7.2	49.5	35.4	39
Professional occupations	100	25.5	37.3	25.5	11
Associate professional and technical occupations	65.5	-	58.5	14	20
Administrative and secretarial occupations	56.1	1.2	2.9	26.4	59
Sales and customer service occupations	47.5	-	21.3	13.1	16
% of the sample	63.7	6.8	33.9	22.9	145

Respondents could give more than one answers

In addition to training programmes provided by an employer, respondents' career development seemed to be influenced by other factors. One of them was the responsibilities and commitments the respondents had outside their workplace. Turning to the personal/ domestic commitments of respondents who were in employment, Table 4.26 reveals a breakdown between type of work and family status. In general, the ratio between the respondents who stated that they were single and those who were married was more than 4:1. One explanation for this was the considerable number of male respondents among PSc & PA graduates compared to nursing graduates where more females were found. Another explanation was the nature of the jobs themselves. Our findings showed that most PSc & PA graduates worked in the private sector and had a contracting job that did not correspond to their degree qualifications. Respondents in this category reported that they did not want to start their own family until they found a permanent job, or at least a job that offered

them a respectable income and career prospects. It is not surprising therefore, that respondents with family commitments were more likely to be found in managerial and professional positions than in any other type of work. Indeed, the total number of respondents who worked in sales and customer care occupations reported that they were single. Additionally, almost 8 out of 10 of the respondents working in associate professional and technical occupations as well as 74.4 per cent of those working in administrative and secretarial positions also stated that they were single. Of the remaining respondents, only 15.6 per cent stated that they had children, 2.1 per cent of the respondents were divorced with children³ and only 0.5 per cent was living with a partner.

Table 4.26: *Type of work and marital status amongst PSc & PA graduates*
(% of respondents)

	Single	Married with children	Married with no children	Divorced with children	Living with a partner	n of respondents
Managers and Senior Officials	35.5	38.3	21	2.6	2.6	39
Professional occupations	53.9	18.4	27.7	-	-	11
Associate professional and technical occupations	79.7	10.1	5.1	5.1	-	20
Administrative and secretarial occupations	74.4	9.2	13.5	2.9	-	59
Sales and customer service occupations	100	-	-	-	-	16
TOTAL	68.7	15.2	13.5	2.1	0.5	145

³ Single motherhood is not an option for the young Greek women. According to Lazaridis (1995), this can be attributed to the lack of state support for young lone mothers and the "honour and shame" value system, which makes lone parenthood a not socially acceptable choice.

Our findings also reveal that the relationship between work type and marital status had a large impact upon female employment. Indeed, as female graduates with family commitments commented, limited career opportunities for working mothers and gender discrimination were the most common reasons for having undertaken an unrelated and -many times reported- under-qualified job⁴.

Based on the above a number of issues should be taken into consideration. The most important amongst them are inflexible working hours and insufficient training provision for qualified female respondents especially those with domestic responsibilities. Indeed, the classic inflexible eight-hour working day creates problems for working mothers. This is because part-time jobs or flexi-time work in Greece, are not usually an option within Greek firms. Like nurses, working women with family commitments from this discipline were taking on an onerous task in their efforts to cope simultaneously with the demands of their jobs and household needs.

Concerning training and education courses, PSc & PA female graduates with family commitments found that their workload in paid employment and their household work limited their access to courses provided by the companies. A study from Patiniotis and Stavroulakis (1997b) has indicated that women are often preferred over men in recruitment in low- responsibility jobs because employers regard women as being 'obedient' and 'accommodating'.

⁴ Recent research from Athens University (Yfantopoulos, 2001), illustrates that despite the increased presence of Greek women in the labour market, both their quality of life and work conditions appear to have become worse rather than better. This is due to the fact that Greek women expend an inordinate amount of effort in order to reconcile their workload in paid employment with household work.

This perception prevails among married women with family commitments in paid, low- skilled employment in where only on-the-job training has been required. Turning to our sample, all female respondents with family commitments claimed that they had received on-the- job training, while only 37.5 per cent of single women had received this kind of training. Half of the single female respondents attended internal and external training seminars (52.8 per cent) compared to 58.3 per cent of married women with children and 28.6 per cent of women with no children. Noticeably, the findings show that married women outnumbered single women in undertaking project work as part of their training process. The same group of women (married women with no children) were also outnumbered by the other groups of marital status in inducting in graduate training programmes (42.9 per cent). Female respondents who have experienced this kind of training were most likely to undertake managerial or senior roles within organisations. Therefore, it is evident that the type of training provided by employers is analogous to the type of work female respondents undertook at the time of the study.

Table 4.27: *Kind of Training and Marital Status amongst Female Political Science and Public Administration Graduates*

Provision of Training	Marital Status (Women %)				
	Single	Married with children	Married with no children	Divorced/ Widowed	Living with a partner
On-the job training	37.5	100	100	100	100
Seminars	52.8	58.3	28.6	-	-
Projects	5.6	-	57.1	-	-
Graduate programme	4.2	25	42.9	-	-
	n= 72	n= 12	n= 7	n= 1	n=1

Respondents could have more than one type of training

In summary, this section examined the professional choices of the respondents after graduating from their first-degree studies in PSc & PA. The findings reveal different professional orientations among the above graduates. As they reported, this was mainly due to the generic nature of their studies. As the result, many respondents were employed in professions not related directly to their first-degree studies. One reason was their further studies in a different scientific area. Another reason was their perceptions that apart from theoretical knowledge their degree studies were inadequate to providing them with practical experience and some transferable skills. The third reason was related to the job search techniques graduates used to find a suitable job in the labour market.

4.4. Discussion

The key findings that emerged from our survey of graduates in the Attica region show that there are key differences between the experiences of nursing and PSc & PA graduates.

With regards to external factors influencing or determining professional development, family preferences are the most important ones for nurses in the initial decision to study for a degree. This finding has received support from recent research by the Transition Observatory of educational and employment pathways of secondary students (2001), which shows that Greek parents are not willing to let their children decide by themselves their tertiary education preferences following completion of secondary education. Thus, it is fair to say that there is a better awareness of the vocational value of a nursing degree, so parents are encouraging students towards this discipline. In contrast, PSc & PA were more likely to be influenced by the job itself.

In this regard, professional flexibility, career prospects and social status were also important.

Respondents from both disciplines agreed that the choice of *specific* departments was also determined by the result of the national examination. With regards to the examination process, it is evident that the increasing number of state academic institutions is the most important reason for the increased number of students in the tertiary education. Indeed, as Kanellopoulos argues (1996), these developments between broad disciplines do not reflect changes in the students' pattern of demand (desire) for higher education, but changes in the supply of the various university places offered by the government. Therefore, selection procedures and limits on the number of places available contribute significantly to the regulation of the size of the student population. For instance, there are significant differences between graduates from a theoretical discipline and an occupation specific programme of study, such as nursing. This conclusion received support from the findings of our research. With regards to the vocational skills picked up during the two degrees, a very high proportion of nursing graduates stated that they had undertaken a six months-compulsory work internship as part of their studies (94.3 per cent). Therefore, as it might be expected, they felt that their practical skills were of great value (97.1 per cent). Accordingly, nursing graduates stated that their studies were very much likely to provide them with transferable skills. In contrast, PSc & PA respondents reported that their degree was very generic and theoretical. Therefore, it is not surprising that nine out of ten of our PSc & PA respondents claimed that theoretical knowledge was the strongest skill obtained by their studies. Respondents from this discipline also stated that their studies provided them with transferable skills. The ability to research

and analyse information from a variety of sources along with writing, presentation and team working were among these skills.

On the whole, a high number of nursing graduates found correspondence between their current job and their degree studies. Further studies were an option only to those nursing graduates that decided to change their professional orientation. As the findings showed, the most important reason cited for the minority of respondents who obtained a further degree in a different area of studies, was due to the perception that there were limited job opportunities in their discipline. Unlike the nursing graduates, findings from the PSc & PA respondents showed that the majority of respondents felt that career opportunities in this area were limited. For those graduates further study was a way to obtain more transferable skills and knowledge, making it easier to adapt to the current working environment.

In a more general basis, our findings show that PSc & PA graduates currently working in the private sector are employed in professions unrelated to their first-degree title. As Patiniotis and Stavroulakis (1997) note, 'Hetero-Employment', is a widespread tendency of graduates to follow an occupation that is different from their qualifications and specialisation. One reason for this tendency is the high level of unemployment amongst young people (up to 10 per cent according to the National Labour Force Survey, 1999). This fact combined with the surplus of graduates in recent years, especially from theoretical disciplines, makes these people apply for any vacant position, even if it refers to jobs typically considered to be for non-graduates, such as general office assistants, secretaries, receptionists and typists and call centre agents or operators. Indeed, as the findings revealed, the areas of employment open to

graduates in politics and public administration were varied. The range of occupations graduates entered was very wide, making it difficult to generalise about destinations. Examining also the contribution of the employers in the career development of the respondents the research shows that graduate-training programmes were not so popular amongst Greek companies/organisations. On-the-job training was the most inexpensive and still the most prevalent training among different types of work.

Probing the recruitment methods respondents used to find their current job, government announcements were the most popular method amongst public sector employees. On the other hand, newspaper advertisements and personal connections were the most important job search methods amongst graduates employed in the private sector.

Finally, the findings suggest that there was a strong association between occupation and marital status. As the survey illustrates, married men with children were far more likely to be in a professional position when compared to women in a similar situation. However, it seems that this was not the case with women who were single or married with no children. More specifically, there is an outnumbering of female respondents in employment who stated that they are single or married with no children. Overall, many of the respondents from both disciplines felt that in Greece it was easier to seek a professional career when there were no family commitments.

The following chapters report the findings of the qualitative phase of the study. They seek to identify the extent to which pre and post degree decisions influence the career choices of graduates and their perceptions regarding the value of their degree studies.

The qualitative chapters also explore economic, political and social influences upon the employability of young qualified people.

Chapter Five

Experiences and Perceptions of Graduates before and after Completing their Degree Studies

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters it has been established that the phenomenon of graduate employment is a dynamic one. This chapter is the first of the two chapters reporting the findings of our qualitative investigation. The empirical focus of this thesis is to examine graduates' pre (initial choices for further studies) and post (upon completion) degree decisions and how these impact on their employment opportunities. Drawing from 22 interviews, this chapter considers the perceptions and experiences of a sample of respondents graduating from PSc & PA and nursing. Its principal concern is to analyse graduates' views on the value of their degree in the labour market and subsequent career activities.

In order to achieve the above, the analysis is conducted in three separate levels. Firstly, the chapter investigates the factors influencing graduates' decision to enter higher education. More specifically, it looks at the impact of the current educational structure and family environment upon graduates' initial decision to study. Secondly, it probes into the graduate decision making process and activities upon completion of their degree studies; in detail it investigates whether graduates decided to stay in academia and pursue a further degree, or enter employment immediately after graduation, and the reasons behind that decision. However, in order to fully comprehend these reasons, the research also concentrated on the perceived (by the graduates) value of their degree in the labour market. Career progression and barriers to that progression were also examined.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 5.2 reports the factors that influence graduates' decisions for their pre-degree choices. Section 5.3 focuses on graduates' different career activities and personal experiences, after completion of their degree studies. Section 5.4 examines the position of nursing graduates within their work settings and perceptions of their degree value. Section 5.5 addresses perceived experiences of graduates working in different employment sectors and with different employment status. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of the empirical data.

5.2 Factors that influence graduates pre-degree choices

This section investigates the factors that influenced graduates' initial decision to study for a specific degree discipline. Even though our findings from the previous chapter revealed that PSc & PA graduates were more likely to be influenced by future career prospects, interviews with some of the respondents revealed that the influence of the immediate family environment was also one of the most important factors when making their pre-degree choices. The following quotation by *George*- a PSc & PA graduate -points to the contribution of family members in graduates' initial decisions to study for a specific degree:

'I was quite fortunate, because my brother was employed when I completed secondary education. Therefore, he was aware of the current labour market trends. In the last grade, I did not have a clear idea of what I would like to do after school. I was an average student with low grades in mathematics, physics and literature. My brother suggested that I should choose this department, when I applied for the national exams, because it had many theoretical subjects such as management and history modules, which I was very interested in. I believe that my professional career is based on my initial decision to study for this degree subject. My university studies have greatly influenced my professional career. I hold a Master's and a PhD in this field and I am currently working both as an academic lecturer and as a postgraduate programme manager'.

(George, Male, Postgraduate Programme Manager)

This quote indicates that appropriate guidance from a family member regarding professional orientations and degree choices is a very important determinant in graduates' initial decisions to study for a specific degree subject. The decision to undertake studies and the level of those studies may be based, in part, on past family achievements. Indeed, as *Marina's* comments reveal:

'The only thing my parents and I were dreaming of was for me to enter into higher education. This is why I participated in the national exams. There was a dual reason behind this aspiration. The first one was related to the prestige and status offered by holding a university degree. Secondly, they thought that through the qualifications I would have obtained from my university studies I would have been given the opportunity to earn a respectable income and have a better career progression. I believe that their expectations for my future career are far from my current situation'

(Marina, Female, Nurse)

By taking family members as important role models into consideration as well as societal stereotypes on the value of some professions in the labour market, some graduates found it easy to decide on their future career and some others did not:

'I always wanted to become a nurse, as long as I can remember. This is because both my brother and sister are doctors and I know that they earn a respectable income and are in a high prestige profession. My family and relatives are very proud of them. I also wanted to make my family proud of me. I was a very good student at school and I was encouraged by my teachers to apply for medicine. Although I sat for national exams three times, I did not succeed in entering in the medical school, as my average score in the exams was low. I decided to enroll in the nursing department because I was very determined to enter tertiary education'.

(George, Male, Senior Consultant)

For another graduate, *Elena*, attendance at the political science department was more a result of various factors (such as a low score in the national exams, being indecisive about what career to follow, parents financial position etc.) rather than a personal career choice:

‘From a very young age I dreamt of becoming a teacher. However, I soon realized that I would face difficulty in finding a job in that profession. When I decided to sit for national examinations I did not have any career orientation or guidance or a very clear idea of what I would like to do in the future. The only reasons that affected my choice were of financial nature. My parents were quite straightforward: ‘ we do not have the money to sponsor your studies’. Therefore I applied only for those departments located in Athens [her area of residence]’

(Elena, Female, Secretary)

Yet, even in this case, the importance of the family in shaping decisions, whereby financial constraints influenced the location of study, is clear. Indeed, financial dependency on the family was also another important factor graduates had to take into consideration when deciding which department to apply for and which discipline to follow. The family's social and financial background is an important determinant in any student's initial decision to study for an academic degree. This is due to a lack of State funding for higher education, making students more dependent on their family. Details of parents' occupations and financial situation reveal that graduates from both disciplines came largely from agriculture and working class backgrounds. However, PSc & PA graduates' families were more socially heterogeneous, drawing graduates from ‘upper’ working-class and ‘lower’ middle class backgrounds. In both cases the most important issue was whether families were able to support students, both financially and psychologically. As our findings from Chapter Four showed, Greek families were very

concerned with their children's education. Indeed, when we asked *Aggeliki* which was the most important factor for her initial decision to study for a higher degree she explained:

'My parents affected my initial decision to study. Since I remember myself my mother was always telling me that I had to go to university to educate myself, as this was the only way to be successful in life. I cannot forget their support during my studies. Not only they spent a considerable amount of money for preparation courses but they also supported me psychologically by staying awake with me many nights while I was studying for the exams. At the end, my success was their success as well'.

(Aggeliki, Female, Nurse)

In such cases, parents provided financial and psychological support in the form of encouragement for further studies, of continuing financial support after their children completed secondary education, sponsoring preparation courses for the national examinations and generally contributing to their children's travel and living expenses. *Dimitris'* story is also a very good example. He had not pondered what to do after school. He felt there was no need to think about it. The last two years in lyceum he focused on preparing for the national exams. He decided to participate in the national exams - as his parents wished - but he did not have any specific preferences for the choice of degree subject:

'Academic studies are of value for three main reasons. First, you have a 4-5 years lead-time to decide what you actually want to do in your life. Secondly, everybody respects you and nobody accuses you of being lazy or useless. Thirdly, your parents are more than happy to sponsor your studies and make your life comfortable while you study'.

(Dimitris, Male, Research Fellow)

Dimitris' case represents a certain group of students that did not care what the degree they studied for was as long as they were able to get through the exams. The central

theme emerging here is one of *preparation* or lack of it. Essentially, the graduates had certain expectations of what they wanted to do (or were expected to do by their family), but these expectations meant nothing if low scores were obtained on the national examinations. Results in the national examinations could mean respondents having to attend either departments or degree courses that were not initially on their agenda. In other words, they would have to take what they could get. A more in-depth analysis of the importance of national exams (at the time when the sample of graduate respondents was graduated from their degree studies-1997) as well as of other factors shaping graduates' decisions such as career guidance and the role of career teachers within Greek schools is presented in Chapter Six.

In summary, this section showed that the family environment, as well as the examination preparation and outcomes are considered the key determinants for graduates' pre-degree decisions. However, as the next sub-section shows, family also exerts an important influence in shaping graduates' post-degree activities.

5.3. Career decision-making and transitions

The second part of our interviews focused on the decision-making process that took place after our graduates completed their degree studies. Again, the family context was considered, but more attention was paid to influence relating to graduates' experiences from work. As Schein (1978) suggests, at this stage of their life, graduates attempt to develop a basis for realistic professional choices. Our findings revealed two main issues: the decision of whether to stay in academia and continue for a further degree, which

might be related or not to academic studies; the decision of when to enter in the labour market and get a first job which may well be the basis of graduates' career or not.

5.3.1. Further studies

With regards to a graduate's decision to continue for further studies it seems that much rests on the type of career that a graduate wishes to pursue. Based on the above, graduates were asked how satisfied they were with the decisions they had made regarding their academic studies. They were also asked how confident they felt about their professional career. Our interviews with nursing graduates showed that, for those wishing to pursue a nursing career, the vocational nature of the degree was largely appropriate for this, and as *Christina* admitted:

'I was confident of my qualifications and skills after graduating from nursing. My degree qualifications / skills have been fully utilised in my current job as a nurse. After graduating from tertiary education, I had a clear view of what my future work was about.'

(Christina, Female, Nurse)

Those nursing graduates that found employment in hospital settings typically believed that they made an extensive use of both theoretical and practical skills in their current job.

'Within my working environment, I realised that good knowledge in your area of expertise and working experience are more important to career progression than a second degree'.

(Aggeliki, Female, Nurse)

Yet, even though a nursing degree was appropriate for many of those graduates who wished to pursue a career in nursing, for others, the key issue in their decision to

undertake further studies was one of professional flexibility. As the career advisor of a nursing department commented, most nursing graduates also felt that they were deficient in more generic skills:

‘ There is a common complaint amongst nursing graduates. They feel that their studies do not give them professional flexibility in the Greek labour market. The departments as well as the modules that graduates were taught have only but one professional orientation: their employment as nurses in caring settings and social services. Nursing graduates wishing to change their professional orientation are not able to do so without any further training’.

(Katerina, female, Career Advisor)

This perceived lack of generic or transferable skills was an influential factor in some graduates' decisions to continue for further studies. Certainly, some nursing graduates felt that postgraduate studies in the same area were helpful if they wanted to change professional orientation. For example, *George* - a nursing graduate - felt that postgraduate studies in specialized scientific areas could widen his career choices:

‘I was not satisfied with my professional development as a nurse. I felt that job opportunities in this area were limited, as was any career progression. With my Master's degree in Health Economics, I believe that I have obtained professional flexibility and I am able to expand my horizon in new scientific areas’.

(George, Male, Senior Consultant)

It seems that for those graduates with wider aspirations, the vocational nature of their Bachelor's degree may not have been entirely appropriate to pursue their professional career, so they decided to undertake further post-graduate studies.

For some PSc & PA graduates, professional development through their first-degree studies seemed to be different due to the theoretical nature of their programmes. As the following quote by *Eleni* demonstrates:

'My degree provided me with a broad theoretical knowledge, which has not been utilized in my current job. What I strongly believe is that, Business and Polytechnic schools provide students with practical and technical skills, which help them specialize in a field. If I knew my professional development before I undertook this specific degree, I would have made a different choice'.

(Eleni, Female, Secretary)

Many PSc & PA graduates stated that if they could turn back time, they would have chosen to go to a different department and some of them would have considered studying for a different degree. It used to be the case that graduates would have better career prospects than non-graduates within work settings, but according to their comments the current situation is not that straightforward. Some PSc & PA graduates thought that their degree was inadequate to provide them with the appropriate skills required in the current graduate labour market. Therefore, the case here is not only finding a job related to the first degree, but also acquiring skills that are desirable in the labour market. As *Kyriaki* explained:

'Due to the fact that in my country the market is rather volatile, I was not confident about my future career. I felt that I could not rely on my first-degree studies to get a job. This is why I decided to change my career orientation by doing a Master's degree in a completely different field (MBA). I hoped I would have more chances to a better career'.

(Kyriaki, Female, Recruitment Specialist)

In such cases, further studies were perceived as a path through which graduates were able to obtain more transferable skills and knowledge, making it easier for them to adapt to the current working environment. This was mainly the reason why they decided to continue

for further studies in another professional area, to enhance their chances of finding an appropriate job and earn a respectable income.

Family sponsorship was critical not only during the academic studies but also in the career routes thereafter. Variations in family support could be seen to affect graduates' career choices after university, for example, their ability to fund a full-time post-graduate course, often through parental support. It was notable that those who could not expect any further financial support from home after graduating from their first degree studies were the ones most reluctant to consider taking any further training or continuing for postgraduate studies in order to enhance their career opportunities. This is because the state scholarship system for post-graduate studies is limited to a significant small number of graduates through national examinations. Indeed, according to *Mary*:

'Both my parents come from the working class. I had to take several part-time jobs during my studies because their financial support was inadequate to cover my living expenses. Unfortunately, my degree studies are not so popular in the labour market. I wanted to continue for postgraduate studies but I did not have the money or the willingness to take exams for a state scholarship. I believe that graduates from a wealthy background have more chances to have a successful career'.

(Mary, Female, Account Clerk)

For some students, continuing their academic studies at a post-graduate level was seen as one of a very narrow set of options open to them, including studying for a different course or getting a job immediately after graduating. In terms of the latter issue, financial dependency on the family was also another important factor graduates had to take into consideration when deciding what they wanted to do after completing their degree

studies. When we asked *Mary* why she did not continue for postgraduate studies she replied:

'...Due to financial constraints my family could not sponsor any further studies for myself. Postgraduate studies in Greece are not a public expenditure as university studies are. Moreover, postgraduate studies abroad are very expensive and I do not consider them to be an investment for my future'.

(Mary, Female, Account Clerk)

These comments have some relevance with results from studies into returns to education. According to Lianos *et al.* (2002), the higher the income of the family and the level of education of graduates' fathers, the more prolonged is the period between graduation and employment, suggesting that wealthier families may be able to support students over longer periods of decision-making after graduation. Indeed, as *Dimitris* explains:

' I was not sure of what I wanted to do after graduation. I applied for a number of jobs but with no success. To my father [he is a financial director] education is very important so he strongly encouraged me to continue for further studies in order to enhance my job-hunting opportunities. Having no financial constraints, I was able to continue for postgraduate studies.'

(Dimitris, Male, Research Fellow)

Therefore, it is likely that graduates of wealthier and better-educated families can afford to wait for longer and enjoy a longer search time in finding an appropriate job for themselves. The next stage of a graduate's career activity deals with their transition into the labour market, and it is to this that we now turn.

5.3.2 Transitions into the labour market

As we found in Chapter Four, it was common for nursing graduates to move directly into work after graduation, in jobs that were highly related to their programmes of study. As a consequence, few continued onto further studies. When asked, many nursing graduates linked the perception of a 'good' job to the content of their degree study and jobs where their qualifications had been required. Some also added 'permanency' as a quality of a 'good job'. *Margarita's* biography was a good case in point. Both *Margarita's* parents came from working class backgrounds. They used to work in the very profitable agricultural sector that within the last couple of decades has experienced a serious decline. It was the family's goal that *Margarita* entered academia and found a vocationally oriented job, ideally in Athens.

'I strongly believe that there are not that many employment opportunities in Greece. Especially in the case of hospitals operating in the countryside it is evident that they do not have either the adequate equipment or efficient number of clinical departments. As a result, there is a significant shortage in hospital staff. If I had returned to my birthplace after graduation, I would not have any other option but to work in my father's farm. I wanted to do something different and find a respectable permanent job related to my academic qualifications. This is the reason why I decided to stay in Athens'.

(*Margarita*, Female, Senior Nurse)

Therefore, in some cases, a 'good' job seemed to be associated with a job in a city. This may reflect the fact that for graduate nurses regional county labour markets narrowed their job opportunities significantly. Consequently a job in a big city would be perceived as the pathway for their career progression within their area of professional interest.

For nursing graduates, therefore, the concept of a 'good job' was one that related to their degree studies, job security and geographical preferences. For many PSc & PA graduates, slightly different views of a 'good' job were held:

'A good job...maybe a graduate level job with a respectable income'.

(Mary, Female, Account Clerk)

It is evident that for graduates of both disciplines a 'good' job was often perceived as a technical term that determined whether the job they were actually holding was related to the subject of their degree. However, there is a difference between respondents from both disciplines. Given the vocational nature of their degree studies, nursing graduates perceived a 'good job' as the one that corresponded to the nursing profession. In contrast, PSc & PA graduates related a 'good job' to any graduate status job that would give them a respectable income. This can be attributed to the fact that our PSc & PA sample was occupationally heterogeneous and included more respondents that were employed in non-graduate occupations.

In addition to this, the study reveals other pressures that impacted upon graduates' decision to commence employment that depend upon financial considerations and family support. Indeed, interviews with PSc & PA graduates also revealed that those graduates employed in a job unrelated to their degree subject had less time to search for a job because of either their current financial situation or their financial dependency on their low-waged parents. As *John* explained:

'I finished my studies in the University of Athens and immediately started working in my uncle's office as an accountancy assistant. This was due to the fact that I no longer wished to be financially dependent on my parents. Even so, I was not confident enough to rent a flat on my own as I was used to being cared for by my parents. I think that in our culture the majority our young people are used to being supported by their family. Off springs - especially females - stay with their family until they get married'

(John, Male, Account Clerk)

This group of respondents also commented that they decided to start working for financial reasons. *Mary*, for example, was a 29 years' old single woman who still lived (at the time of the research) with her parents. She was unemployed for the first six months after graduating from the department of PSc & PA, as she decided to seek a job related to her qualifications. Yet, lack of work experience made her job-hunting very difficult. She worked for six months in an insurance company as a sales person and one year in a supermarket as a supervisor. In 2001 she found employment in an electrical retail store as an account clerk. Graduates who went into work after finishing their degree studies shared several aspects of *Mary's* story, in terms of the labour market choices that were available to them. Some had little idea of what they wanted to do, or how to find jobs that were consistent with their higher education. It is fair to say that part of graduates' career choices is based on family influences in terms of how these impacted upon students' perceptions about careers and self-worth. Interestingly, while parents of graduates in both disciplines seemed keen to invest in their children's academic education, they had little or no knowledge about career opportunities concerning their children's professional choices after graduating from their first-degree studies. Therefore,

they were unable to assess the value of the courses attended or the realism of their children's goals. According to one PSc & PA graduate:

'In the past PSc & PA studies were considered to be very prestigious. My father was very pleased because he thought that I could find an excellent job in a ministry. Even my grandfather thought that after graduating from this department I could follow a career as a politician or as a permanent senior public servant!!'

(Christos, Male, Financial Analyst)

In addition, geographical location and time spent for commuting were also important factors influencing the search for a 'good' job after graduation. For *Penelope*, a PSc & PA graduate, family commitments were of great importance. As she explained:

'I have not sought employment after graduation in a different geographical area to that of my permanent residence, because of the time I would spend commuting. I believe that, if I spent too much time working and commuting I would not have much in my personal life. I am married and I also have domestic responsibilities. To me my family takes priority over my career'.

(Penelope, Female, Secretary)

Our findings revealed that the influence commuting had on graduates' decision to seek employment depended on family commitments. To be more specific, graduates with family commitments tended to concentrate on specific geographical areas when looking for a job so as to evenly balance their personal and professional life. On the other hand, single graduates were more flexible, meaning that location was not one of the most influential factors in their job search. This means that they were willing to sacrifice some of their personal time commuting in order to get a job that satisfied their criteria. As *Christos* explains:

'Originally, my job search concentrated on areas close to my residence. However, I was determined to extend my job search in other places and spend more time commuting, if I could not find something appropriate in my home city. At the end of the day, what was more important to me was to get a good job regardless of the location'.

(Christos, Male, Financial Analyst)

In summary, family influence and personal perceptions as well as geographical restrictions were the key factors shaping graduates' initial employment trajectories post graduation.

5.3.3 Career progression and changing expectations: The fit between academic study and employment

The third issue explored related to respondents' career progression, which we considered in terms of their own reporting of the extent to which their degree was required and used in the jobs they had.

Most nursing graduates felt confident about the correspondence between their degree studies and the skills they have used and gained in their current roles. However, this was not the case with PSc & PA graduates. More specifically, the subjective perception of the majority of PSc & PA respondents was that they were not in appropriate employment for people with their skills and qualifications. According to them, 'good' graduate positions were rarely available in their professional area. As Serafetinidis (2001) argues, many big companies in Greece have been targeting their recruitment towards people with lower qualifications or degree disciplines related to their company's continuing changing needs. This is a practice that may have alienated graduates from theoretical departments from many entry-level positions. Perhaps as a consequence of this, many graduates in PSc &

PA questioned the value of their degree studies. The majority of our respondents agreed that they were not confident with the skills and qualifications obtained from their first-degree studies. This was because they felt that the degree had provided a broad theoretical knowledge, which was not applicable to their job at the time of the research. They also felt that they had not gained sufficient practical experience during their time at university. *Kostas* felt that his degree studies were inadequate to offer him good job prospects:

‘I hoped to find a better job using my qualifications, but to be honest I did not expect to find a job related to my degree. I felt that degree qualifications could not guarantee a job as a senior administrator officer, a public servant or even a politician. What are also needed are strong political connections. In addition, there is an overpopulation of graduates in the private sector and graduate jobs are not that many’.

(*Kostas*, Male, Sales Representative)

In the context of increasing student numbers, graduates' skills and qualifications have become less valuable as a form of competitive advantage. At the same time, the value of vocational professions has increased:

‘I believe that there is a shortage of skilled professionals in Greece. Even career advisors agree that plumbers and plasterers are in greater demand than graduates. No wonder why graduates feel useless’ .

(*Yiannis*, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

Evidence from recent British research suggests that this finding may not only be limited to the Greek situation (Perryman, 2003). Indeed, findings of the IES (Institute of Employment Studies) Annual Graduate Review reveals that the prospects of new

graduates do not appear to be as certain as they have been in recent years. This issue raises the question whether graduates are simply unaware of the current labour market trends or do not possess the required skills as to be attractive to their potential employers. Many graduates from our study agreed that the most important reason for the time gap between graduation and the search for a suitable job for them was lack of appropriate information regarding the opportunities within their desired professions. They were also unaware of the actual skills required for some of the positions that they applied for and lacked the ability to 'sell' these skills to their potential employers.

'Since I graduated from the department of PSc & PA, I had not been able to find a job that corresponded to my academic qualifications. I believe that, the main reasons for the educational unemployment of graduates in social sciences are the inadequacy of industrial placements and the lack of information on skills in demand'.

(Doukas, Male, Public Servant)

Most of the career advisors and academic professors interviewed also agreed with this position:

'A degree itself does not immediately offer you a job in Greece after graduation. There are some other factors that play an important role such as interpersonal skills, work experience, professional qualifications as well as personal connections'.

(Fotis, Graduate Male, Recruitment Consultant)

Current trends in the labour market regarding the supply and demand of some of the professions are also a very influential factor on the employability of graduates from both degree disciplines. According to *Antonis*:

'Graduate unemployment or hetero-employment is due to the fact that many graduates from our department applied for jobs that did not necessarily require a degree. Thus, if there is an overpopulation of graduates from theoretical sciences in the labour market, individuals with vocational qualifications will be of high demand'.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

In this context, Serafetinidis (2001) argues that the state system for education in Greece is not changing in line with the changing needs of the economy. *Elena's* experience concerning professional guidance from teachers and professors not only throughout her studies, but also after engaging in full-time employment, is a very distinctive example. *Elena* had high aspirations upon entering higher education and subsequently finding a job in the graduate labour market. After finishing her first degree in the department of PSc & PA, she clearly identified a need to assess the risks associated with aiming for certain goals and other options regarding the popularity of her degree in the labour market. Therefore she concentrated on what was most realistic for her career. She weighed the advantages and disadvantages of beginning to search for a job relevant to her studies. At the same time she did not want to waste time in her job searching activities. Therefore, she found a semi-skilled job (administrator in an insurance company) very close to her place of residence. At the same time she decided to continue her studies at a postgraduate level in order to increase the possibilities of finding a better job. However, she did not have any personal or political connections that could be used to 'facilitate' her job search. She could not, therefore, find any job that recognised her qualifications. As a result, she decided to stay in the same job.

Over-education and correspondence between the content of studies and type of employment are related. A graduate who decides to accept a job that is unrelated to the area of his / her studies is very likely to feel that he / she is overeducated for that job. According to Lianos *et al.* (2002), the phenomenon of over-education occurs when there is a mismatch between the level of education an individual has and the level of education required to perform the job. As Chapter Four shows, a considerable proportion of graduates were found in jobs that were likely to under-utilise their academic degree knowledge and skills. This problem appeared to be particularly acute amongst our sample of PSc & PA graduates, many of whom were employed in positions that were unrelated to their degree subject. As *Mary* commented:

‘A degree is supposed to give you an advantage in the labour market. However, what seems to be the case is that, semi-skilled jobs such as clerical jobs or sales jobs are of higher demand. In this case, qualifications such as word typing, languages, computer programmes are very important when looking for a job. I am currently working as an account clerk that is totally irrelevant to my studies and I am also underpaid. Unfortunately, I have to do this job because I need the money’.

(Mary, Female, Account Clerk)

Interview findings also reveal that a proportion of the respondents chose not to use the full extent of their qualifications. In Greece, there is an increasing tendency for potential employees to take first jobs, or employers to offer first jobs, below their educational value (Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1997). As Chapter Three reveals, this perception is underpinned by the fact that in the Greek context most tasks, including those formally demanding advanced qualifications, are carried out by empirical methods, and involve competencies easily acquired within the brief period of on-the-job training. Therefore, the

poor content of jobs does not justify high formal qualifications occupationally demanded by certain employers. Demekas and Kontolemis (1997:90) also suggest that graduates are reluctant to lower their expectations and accept a job not on a par with their qualifications, skills and aspirations for upward social mobility:

'After graduation I realised that my career prospects were limited. It seemed that employer required additional (practical) skills that I had not attained through my degree. My family sponsored my postgraduate studies in the UK and has been supporting me up until the present day. As they claim they intend to do so until I find a respectable job and get married. Still, I feel disappointed as I realised that someone does not need academic qualifications in order to perform in my current job. However, it is not easy to find a graduate job in the Greek labour market. This is due to the fact that there is a small number of large companies in Greece that recruit graduates. I do not wish to be unemployed. Therefore I compromised my career prospects to what seemed to be more realistic'.

(Eleni, Female, Secretary)

As more graduates are entering the market, the value of educational qualifications is undermined. As Lianos *et al.* note (2002), having excess education for a job mostly has a negative effect on graduate earnings. In addition, it produces lower returns to education compared with those people with the same education who are 'appropriately' placed. The evidence from the present study suggests that the negative effect on graduate employment may affect those disciplines that are more general, that is, the ones that do not correspond effectively to particular occupations in the Greek labour market. A key issue, therefore, is whether the expansion of higher education has impacted upon the occupational structure and the construction of jobs by employers or whether employers are using this to actually reduce the cost of positions. According to Gouvias (1998), the universalisation of secondary education and the expansion of higher education during the last twenty years

have resulted in an abundance of over-qualified degree holders, who are frequently forced to work in jobs where only a good standard of general education is enough.

Based on the above, the next sub-section seeks to investigate the position of tertiary education graduates in order to assess the value of their academic qualifications and skills within their work settings.

5.4. The position of graduates within work settings

Our interviews explored whether there were any differences between secondary (vocational institutions-auxiliary nurses) and tertiary education (University and Technological Institutions-certified nurses) graduates regarding their educational status, technical knowledge and training provision. With regards to the first issue, most of the senior sisters interviewed felt that the main difference between secondary and tertiary graduates was the academic knowledge and expertise required in medical professions in order to perform the job:

'I strongly believe that an academic degree does make a difference when it comes to employers. A tertiary education graduate has critical thinking and is capable of receiving and effectively applying new knowledge. This kind of knowledge is impossible to be taught in work settings. A graduate from tertiary education has more professional opportunities and better chances for career progression within an organisation'.

(Evaggelia, Female, Senior Nurse)

Evaggelia also reported that the distribution of responsibilities could widen as the educational level of nurses widens. Based on this statement, another two distinctive

differences between nurses graduating from an academic or technological institution were reported: expertise in the field of study and opportunities for further knowledge and training:

‘Technological institution graduates have better technical knowledge. However, according to current Greek legislation, vocational school nurses are not allowed to have too many responsibilities. This is because their qualifications are not efficient. This is why university graduates usually take the administration posts in the hospitals and clinics’.

(Anastasia, Female, Nurse)

Margarita also added that academic nurses were more likely to receive further training and therefore have better career prospects within their organization. As she explained, lifelong learning within the medical sector is very important for two main reasons: awareness in medical developments and continuous development in their area of specialisation.

‘Certified nurses do not only have the know-how of the profession but also are able to receive further knowledge and training. I believe that this is what makes the difference’.

(Margarita, Female, Senior Nurse)

Nevertheless, some graduates also suggested that there were similarities amongst nursing personnel regarding their educational status and day-to-day responsibilities.

With regards to nurses’ status as well as their performance within hospitals, there were similarities between certified nurses graduated from university and certified nurses graduated from technological institutions. However, it seems that the role of university nurses was not fully recognized within hospital settings. When asked what was the role of university nurses within hospital settings *Aggeliki* answered:

'I do not think that nurses graduating from universities are essential in hospitals and clinics. Their studies are quite similar to technological institutions. The only difference is that, university nurses have more modules in health and hospital management. My opinion is that other graduates from business administration who specialize in health and hospital management are also able to take their positions'.

(Aggeliki, Female, Nurse)

Based on this issue it might be argued that the value of an academic nursing degree is questionable. The university degree in nursing itself includes broader aspects of management, but the management skills attained are not competitive enough when applying for a managerial post within hospitals. In other words, academic nurses have general theoretical management knowledge but they lack practical managerial skills. Therefore, it is not unusual to find managers without nursing background in hospitals. However, it is not fair to say that an academic degree hinders people from getting jobs as nurses. As Charis, a technological institution graduate explained:

'University graduates are not so good in practicing their profession as practical nurses. Their education both in university and within the hospital is more related to administration management. From my personal experience, I feel that they deny their role as practical nurses. They are looking for something different, a supervisory role I could say. I think that the university title makes the difference for them.

...During the last five years, there was a change in the name of tertiary education nurses as hospitalisers. The term nurse is now used only for college nurses who are the support staff. In practice all nurses, even from different educational level perform the same job'.

(Charis, Male, Nurse)

Despite the fact that in-work experience and promotion remains the most effective way of upward mobility for the majority of qualified personnel, there is little evidence that

opportunities to rise into management from below have increased dramatically, especially with the growing emphasis on academic qualifications.

This issue is also obvious when we examined the responsibilities that were allocated to nursing graduates within work settings. As graduate nurses claimed, sometimes in work settings it was very difficult to distinguish between educational levels. Work experience and personal capabilities of nurses were thought to be equally important. Indeed, as a *Petroula* noted:

‘I am working with very few university graduates. I could not have realised their educational status if they had not told me so. The daily responsibilities are the same’.

(*Petroula*, Female, Diplomate /Auxiliary nurse)

The above quotation reveals that in reality mixed and sometimes overlapping responsibilities were quite a common phenomenon amongst nursing personnel with different educational backgrounds and positions within the hospitals. In other words, there are more complex factors influencing the employment opportunities of nurses within hospitals. For instance, academic nurses do not necessarily have an advantage over practical nurses, as competence in their work settings is valued according to practical skills, especially when there is a shortage of nursing staff:

‘Due to the fact that there is a big turnover of qualified nurses in private clinics there is not a specific allocation of tasks between the two educational categories. That is why we consider ourselves more or less on a similar level of work and status’.

(*Petroula*, Female, Diplomate /Auxiliary nurse)

As far as PSc & PA graduates are concerned, we have insufficient information to draw robust conclusions on their positions within their work settings. As Chapter Four revealed, the PSc & PA graduates sample was more heterogeneous with regards to their work settings and status. However, a common theme amongst PSc & PA graduates was that, their employment opportunities were influenced by the content of the academic studies.

More specifically, many PSc & PA graduates commented that social and political studies do not have a specific professional orientation by themselves. That is why the 'hetero-employment' of graduates of this discipline is extremely high compared to other degree disciplines. As *Mary explains*:

'It is difficult for graduates from PSc & PA to define their professional orientation after graduation. This is because their studies are very broad and do not lead to any professional specialisation. Therefore it is difficult to talk about career progression in our field based on our degree studies'.

(Mary, Female, Account Clerk)

Similarly, *Marina* reported that lack of technical expertise could prevent graduates from this discipline from finding employment that corresponds to their academic qualifications.

'I believe that if I had chosen to study in another discipline, for instance medicine or chemistry I would have had more practical /technical knowledge and I would have easily found a job more related to my qualifications'.

(Marina, Female, Marketing and Sales Consultant)

As reported, social and other theoretical faculties have a negative effect on graduate employment, as they do not correspond directly to an occupation. However, despite this lack of technical expertise, it was felt that tertiary graduates had an advantage over secondary graduates in the labour market. Most of our respondents expressed the view that a tertiary education graduate has more chances to find a job in the labour market compared to secondary school graduates. As *Kostas* explains:

‘A degree provides you with a theoretical knowledge in a scientific area and gives you the belief that you are more capable of accepting new knowledge than someone without a degree. I think that the fact that I have a degree, regardless of its title, helped me find a job easily’.

(Kostas, Male, Sales Representative)

According to *Kostas*, the main difference between secondary and tertiary education graduates is not only a matter of academic qualification but also of the skills and attributes of value to any potential employer. Moreover, the issue of getting a job is complicated by the degree studies, expectations and the changing nature of the labour market. As *Stella* explains:

‘I believe that you do not have to be a university graduate in order to do my job. You can learn your tasks on the job. I had great expectations for my future career. Unfortunately, my university knowledge has never been recognised in any of the jobs I have been employed to so far. I got a small pay rise due to my first degree and my work experience but my current company does not recognise my Master’s because it is not relevant with the job I am doing. I have not had any career promotion for years’.

(Stella, Female, Customer Services)

In general terms it is fair to say that most graduates from PSc & PA seem to experience an expectation gap regarding what their employer actually requires from a person holding

a position and what graduates' expectations about the jobs are. Thus, some graduates felt that there were over-qualified for their jobs and they did not feel satisfied with their career development within their organization.

However, some other graduates from this discipline expressed the view that their career development was a matter of their professional interests and expectations. *Kyriaki's* case was one of the most characteristic examples. She started her degree studies in the department of PSc & PA in 1980 but gave up as she decided to start her own family. After her divorce in 1988, she started working in the administration in a small retail organization in Athens for 5 years. She decided to continue her first-degree studies in order to get more qualifications and find a better job. After her graduation (July, 1997) she decided to attend two accountancy seminars in order to enhance her career prospects during which she found a job in public administration for 15 months through her political connections. Unfortunately this was a fixed-term contract job that she could not renew. She searched in the newspaper advertisements and in September 2000 she started working in an accountancy assistant position in a retail company. In September 2003 she was promoted to an Account Manager position. She strongly believed that she found her current job because of her accountancy skills and not because of her degree. She was quite satisfied with her current job, because she earned a respectable income and she was promoted twice within two years. Concerning *Kyriaki's* case, it is fair to say that not only the content of the degree studies but also professional preferences, personal circumstances and the development of new skills, impacted upon the jobs that some PSc & PA graduates have taken after graduation. In other words, for many graduates, a PSc &

PA degree alone was not enough to secure a graduate job. Such graduates need to obtain work experience in order to develop more 'attractive' skills in the labour market. It was also important for those graduates to become self-aware and develop the confidence to market themselves effectively.

5.4.1 Sector of employment and graduates' employment status

Following this line of analysis, interviewees were asked to state which sector of employment best represents their skills and qualifications. From the questionnaires, it was clear that both sectors of employment (public, private) constitute important areas of graduate employment. The following discussion draws on our qualitative research to examine respondents' perceptions of the two sectors. For nursing graduates the most common view expressed was that the private sector was not so popular amongst nurses because of the long working hours, job instability and low salary. Indeed, *Katerina* suggested that:

'I prefer working in the public sector for a number of reasons. First of all, salaries and working times are better. I also enjoy a number of benefits such as maternity and pension schemes. But the most important of all is the permanency the job offers'.

(Katerina, Female, Nurse)

Another key issue related to the perceived level of employment security. This has to be weighed against other advantages more commonplace in the private sector. As *Grigoria*, a Senior Nurse in the public hospital, commented:

'I believe that in the public sector we can easily get what we ask for. In the private sector your job is not secure and you depend upon your employer. However, the provision of health care is better in private hospitals. On the other hand, public hospitals attract most graduate nurses. The reason is that professional development is better in public hospitals'.

(Grigoria, Female, Senior Nurse)

Whilst the management and the technological equipment were perceived to be better in the private hospitals, public hospitals surpass them in their scientific know-how due to the large number of qualified nurses working within them. However, some concerns regarding employment and career prospects of nurses in the public hospitals were also quoted:

'It is very difficult to find employment in the public sector due to the increasing number of people applying for a job there. Apart from that, there is no objective evaluation system so other criteria such as personal connections and favoritism play the most important role for promotion. You can be a supervisor or a senior sister only if you have many years of experience and the appropriate personal connections'.

(Charis, Male, Nurse)

For nursing graduates, even though the public sector was the most favourable sector for employment, because it offered good employee benefits, working conditions and it was less demanding than the private sector, it did not provide career progression based on employees qualifications and productivity. It was perceived that this was because it did not have an objective evaluation system so other criteria such as personal connections and favoritism played the most important role for promotion. However interviews revealed that nursing graduates felt more confident to find employment in public sector

organisations compared to social science graduates. Indeed, some of the PSc & PA graduates seemed to be disappointed about the value of their degree and their professional development:

‘I do not think that my degree studies would be utilised either in the public or in the private sector. Other skills such as foreign languages, interpersonal skills, office experience and most popular degrees like Public Relations, MBA, Advertising and Marketing play the most important role in employers' selection decision. My qualifications are not competitive in the private sector’.

(Dimitris, Male, Research Fellow)

Regardless of their professional development, it is worth noting that most of the PSc & PA graduates also agreed that the public sector was the most attractive area of employment. It was believed that formal qualifications would be more effectively utilised in public organisations. However, as Doukas admitted:

‘In order to find a good job in our area you either need to succeed in national exams, organised annually by the government for public servant positions or have strong political connections’

(Doukas, Male, Administration Officer in Local Government)

Nonetheless, some graduates preferred working in the private sector because it offered faster career development than in the public sector. Kyriaki was one of the few political science and public administration graduates who considered private organisations an attractive area of employment. As she explains, she decided to work in this sector because:

'The private sector is more organised, it has a clear job description and focus. Bureaucratic issues and extended deadlines are not present'.

(Kyriaki, Female, Recruitment Specialist)

In summary, graduates from both degree disciplines agreed that the public sector was a more lucrative area of employment compared to the private sector. Although nurses felt that public hospitals seemed to surpass private hospitals in their scientific knowledge - due to the large number of qualified nurses working within them - graduates from both disciplines seem to believe that productivity, the utilisation of wider skills of a graduate and fair evaluation systems are better in the private sector.

Graduates were also asked to comment on their experiences regarding their employment status and sector of employment. A considerable number of graduates working in the private sector-especially PSc & PA graduates reported that it is a common phenomenon for people working in a private Greek organization to be employed on a fixed-term contract. According to Serafetinidis (2001), the high number of graduates in temporary or fixed-term contract jobs is due to the fact that they cannot be absorbed in the public sector or large -size firms. Even in that case, according to employment law, in the private sector a second renewal of a one year fixed-term contract automatically leads to a permanent one (Serafetinidis, 2001). However, some comments made from *Elena*, a PSc & PA graduate, reveal that employers often make decisions that 'overlook' employment regulations:

‘What is usually the case in the Greek private sector, is that you start working on a four months fixed-term contract which can be renewed for five times. In other words you must be working in the same job for at least 2 years before you are able to get a permanent position. However, your salary will not increase during that time. In my case, I was invited to an interview for a four months fixed-term job. Unfortunately, I was asked whether I was planning to get married in the near future. I told them I was. As a result they decided to employ someone younger than I was, with no family commitments’.

(Elena, Female, Administrative Officer)

Less security in employment relationships in the private sector and employment discrimination issues in Greece was two of the key issues highlighted in this study. Taking into account financial and social factors in the Greek labour market, it is fair to say that the actual income in Greece is so low (600 Euros per month approximately) compared to other European countries, that full time employees cannot even meet basic needs. As Lianos *et al.* (2002) points out the low income of a large category of permanent employees hinders moves towards greater flexibility, which means lower earnings. According to Kouzis (2001), the Greek labour market is particularly flexible especially on the ‘illegal’ or ‘informal’ side, an aspect that must be taken into consideration when analysing the degree and depth of flexibility in the Greek labour market:

‘I work in the university administration during the standard working day but I am still underpaid compared to my qualifications and work experience. I was also teaching on behalf of my professor both undergraduates and postgraduate students in our department but I was never paid for this job. I could not say anything because he was my PhD supervisor and I needed him. I also worked as a part-time lecturer in a private college but I did not have a contract at all. I needed extra money to support my family and employers took advantage of my situation. My wife experienced the same problems with her employer, mainly due to the fact that she was a woman and she might have family commitments in the future’

(George, Male, Postgraduate Programme Manager)

Overall, it is evident that multi-employment seems to be a temporary solution for some graduates in order to cope with low salaries paid by employers. Further discussion on this important issue is presented in the following chapter.

5.5 Summary

This chapter focused on the progress of graduates from different degree subjects in the labour market. The first section explored those factors that influenced graduates' pre-degree choices. Evidence from our study revealed that the structure of higher education, the school environment and the family's social and financial status significantly influenced graduates towards higher education. Our findings also showed that by obtaining a degree graduates developed high expectations for direct employment and strong future prospects. The above factors were used to identify the extent to which students had a clear career trajectory, when they decided their degree discipline.

The second part of this chapter focused on the decision-making process that took place after our graduates completed their degree studies. Two main graduates' career trajectories were discussed. The first one was to stay in academia and continue for a further degree that might be related or not to their academic studies and the second one to enter the labour market immediately after graduation. Our findings showed that nursing graduates were more likely to be in jobs related to their degree studies compared to PSc & PA graduates. The latter seemed to experience a time-gap in their transition between graduation and employment. Partly, this was due to the nature of their degree studies, which according to them did not seem to be directed related to an occupation. Therefore,

PSc & PA graduates regarded further studies as a way to attain the necessary skills in order to change their professional orientation and be more flexible in their career choices.

Overall, the main issue that emerged from our study was that, graduates' employment opportunities did not only depend on the nature of their degree studies *per se*, but also on the extent to which the Greek labour market was able to absorb them.

Therefore, the next chapter examines the recruitment consultants', academic professors' and career advisors' views on graduate employment opportunities upon completion of their degree studies. Moreover, it explores the factors influencing graduate employability in Greece. Issues of hetero-employment, over qualification in employment as well as employment discrimination issues are also analysed.

Chapter Six

Perceptions of Career Advisors, Recruitment Consultants and Professors on the Value of Degree Studies and Career Progression in the Greek Labour Market

6.1 Introduction.

This chapter reports the findings of interviews with a number of recruitment consultants, academic professors and career advisors in the Attica region. The chapter examines the views of this sub-sample regarding the value of degree studies in the Greek labour market and the career activities of those individuals graduating from different degree disciplines. It aims to explore some of the issues raised in the graduate questionnaire in such a way as to gain an in-depth understanding of higher education outcomes, graduate career trajectories and the difficulties graduates encounter during this implementation process.

The chapter is structured as follows. Section 6.2 reports the factors that influence graduate decisions on their choice of University degree. Section 6.3 reviews the comments made by career advisors, employers and recruitment consultants on the career activities of graduates after completing their undergraduate courses. Section 6.4 outlines the factors influencing graduate employment. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the empirical findings.

6.2 Factors influencing a student's decision to study for an academic degree.

The focal point of this section is to investigate the role of internal and external forces in graduate employment. In recent years, this is a particularly 'hot' issue; this is because, in the last two decades, the government decided to increase the number of students' enrolments in the faculties of sciences and social sciences in order to meet

the demand for higher education (Gouvias, 1998). This issue has also affected Greek households, as they have been obliged to bear the 'cost' of higher education studies by investing a considerable amount of time and money into them. In this regard, the responding sample such as consultants and university professors were in broad agreement that there have been certain key factors shaping graduates pre-degree decisions in Greece. These are the structure of the education system, the role of the career teachers within it, as well as the importance of the family's social and financial background. These findings correspond with the views of graduates as outlined in the previous chapter.

With regards to the structure of the education system, research findings demonstrate that the academic focus of the upper secondary Greek schools was perceived as one of the most important factors influencing graduates' pre-degree decisions. As past research conducted in this area showed (Kanellopoulos, 1999), the abolition of entrance exams to upper secondary education in the early 1980s had favoured the access to secondary education and its completion. It had also resulted in the increasing number of people continuing for vocational and academic studies. Our research has also revealed that there is a widespread assumption within the Greek educational system that educated people (university graduates) will be successful in the Greek society. Taking this into account, an academic professor argued that the emphasis on the academic orientation of the Greek secondary schools alienates many students from a more vocational orientation:

'This has mostly been the outcome of the Greek education system for decades in Greece: its focus on preparing students for highly regarded university degrees (law, medicine) rather than for vocationally oriented qualifications'.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

The social prestige of vocational education is extremely low (Patiniotis, 2000).

Indeed, as an academic professor from the department of PSc & PA explains:

‘The structure of the Greek general lyceum has only one orientation: national exams preparation for entry in the tertiary education. Secondary education graduates following a vocational training or entering in the labour market with no further qualifications are perceived as the failures of the national exams’.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

A possible sociological interpretation is that, Greek society was traditionally characterised by relatively high social mobility based on access to higher education and as such both the culture of the Greek society and the structure of the education system reinforced this perception (Liagouras *et al*, 2003). Thus a key finding is that by encouraging more entrants into higher education the system itself undervalues vocational education. Based on this issue, it is fair to say that the majority of lyceum leavers do not even consider satisfying their aspirations through vocational education unless they fail at university entrance exams.

With regards to the latter point, all respondents of this sample were asked to assess the effectiveness of the academic orientation of general lyceum in relation to its outcomes. Key findings revealed two areas of consideration: First, the ‘quality’ of students entering higher education and secondly the financial burden of each Greek household for higher education studies. With regards to the first issue, *Antonis*, discussed his views on the role of career teachers in schools and the level of students entering higher education:

‘I believe that the role of career teachers in schools is very important in mentoring students about their post school decisions and providing them with information for alternative routes for career success within the labour market [apart from academic studies]’.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

Antonis argued that the role of the career advisor is very important in keeping youngsters informed about changes in the nature of occupations and work and is therefore increasingly necessary in an exceptionally mobile and changeable work environment. Indeed, according to the Ministry of Education (2001), the career orientation module has been designed to help students develop skills (flexibility, adaptability, communication, co-operation, decision making etc.) necessary for their successful transition from school life to academic or vocational and social life.

However, as *Yiannis*, a recruitment consultant notes:

‘So far the career orientation module in secondary schools has not been taught by experts. Therefore, you cannot really expect them to provide effective counselling on students’ career choices’.

(Yiannis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

The lack of career teachers within schools is considered to be one of the main flaws of the Greek education system. According to *Theodosis*, a Career Advisor:

‘The lack of professional career teachers has a negative effect on the monitoring and assessment of individual students’ achievement as well as on the assessment of their qualities as an indicator of their post school career decisions’.

(Theodosis, Male, Career Advisor)

This view comes in accordance with *Antonis*’ belief that the Greek general lyceum has been transformed into a preparatory level for access to higher education:

‘Unfortunately, the choice of the first-degree seems to be one of the few - if not the only- students’ initial career decisions. It is common that very good students are likely to sit for exams in order to enter medical schools while average students are more likely to sit for exams so as to enter social sciences or vocational institutions. Having said that, it is expected that the educational level of those students enrolling in our department will be average. Therefore, the level of studies decreases as well. Most of our academic professors complain that an average student has a minimum knowledge of mathematics or history or sociology when enrolling in the department of PSc & PA. Last year’s survey showed that 76 per cent of the first year students enrolled in this

department reported that our department was not amongst their first preferences’.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

Several aspects of *Antonis*’ comments resonated across graduates’ initial degree decisions. To start with, it is fair to say that students’ performance at schools is perceived as a screening device for students wishing to apply for specific degrees and departments. If a student wishes to continue his/her studies in the tertiary level there are three possible ways to do so: attend a Greek state University, a private college or study abroad. The only way to attend a state university is through national exams. Only by achieving the required score in the national exams will a student enter in the department of his/her choice. As a result of the above, there are two issues worth noting. First, the age of students entering higher education varies from 18-21 years old. Second, the present system discriminates against the poorest that cannot afford private lessons or extra tuition by preparatory schools. As *Fotis* explained:

‘...Public schools cannot provide efficient preparation for the national examinations. Thus, anyone that wishes to enter into university has to have extra tuition. Unfortunately, some students rely solely on private tuition. Nowadays, it seems that tuition has become a major industry’.

(Fotis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

An explanation for this trend is that, many of those who fail in the national exams and still wish to study in one of the country’s higher educational institutions, attend private preparatory schools or take private lessons so as to resit for the examinations twelve months later. With regards to the age of students entering higher education, Kannelopoulos explains (1999) that under the Greek national examination system’s regulations, every candidate has three chances to sit for the countrywide examinations, in the case when he/she does not succeed in the first attempt or he/she

does not enter in the university of his/her choice. As the career advisor from Pantion explains:

‘The social and economic status of the family will determine their children’s geographical and degree choices. From personal experience, students coming from wealthy and upper class or high educational family backgrounds, are more atypical in their degree and geographical preferences, compared to students that come from agricultural or low –class families’.

(Theodosis, Male, Career Advisor)

With regards to the latter issue it is fair to say that family’s socio-financial background is also one of the most important factors influencing graduates’ pre-degree choices. As Yiannis, a graduate recruitment consultant explained:

‘I believe that the family status is the most influential factor upon the students’ initial decision to enter in academia. In the Greek culture a person’s social and financial status and success are related to academic knowledge’.

(Yiannis, Male, Graduate Recruitment Consultant)

Findings showed that Greek households are very much preoccupied with higher education as a precondition to career progression, social status and financial security. Family financial support seems to play an important role in graduates’ pre-degree decisions. This is due to the fact that their families have to bear the financial burden in the case that they are not successful in the entrance examinations on their first attempt.

This perception was also supported by a study of the Greek sociology of education that points out that a pressure for higher education was prevalent (Tsoukalas, 1986) according to which elder family members exercised a strong pressure to their children to obtain a third-level qualification. In addition, within Greek society, it is believed that academic studies will promote the social and financial mobility of the family.

Based on this issue all respondents agreed that academic studies are one of the most important concerns of both Greek households and secondary schools outcomes.

The next section concerns with graduates' career activities after completing their degree studies and their subsequent career decisions.

6.3 Perceptions on career activities of graduates from nursing and political science and public administration.

Our findings from the interviews with the recruitment consultants, career advisors and professors demonstrated that graduates' career activities could be examined in terms of their career decisions to remain inactive (graduate employment), access the first job that becomes available (atypical forms of employment), and /or continue for further studies.

6.3.1 Graduate unemployment and atypical forms of employment.

With regards to graduate unemployment and atypical forms of employment, several important issues emerged from the research. The first and most important of all is the structure of the current higher education system followed by the obligatory military service for the male population. In addition, what is noted is that, the family acts as a financial protection mechanism against potential graduate unemployment. Another issue concerns the atypical forms of employment, which are seen by graduates as a temporary solution when job-hunting.

As the recruitment consultants from this study noted, the length of time between completion of first degree studies and finding a job is not necessary a period of unemployment, nor should be considered as such. This is because the duration of

academic studies depends on two important factors: The field of study and the structure of examination systems within academic institutions. According to *Antonis*:

‘Normally you would expect nursing graduates to complete their course in 3 years time with an additional 6 months placement. Social science graduates would complete their studies in 4 years. Unfortunately the duration of studies in Greek universities is indefinite’.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

An important characteristic of the Greek higher educational system is that, it allows students to resit for exams for as many as three times in order to enter the department of their choice. This means that the average duration of the studies is higher than the one defined by the Ministry of Education. Due to this, there is no particular age that a graduate enters the labour market.

In the case of the male population, the situation is slightly more complicated. This is due to the fact that men are obliged to do military service anytime between finishing secondary education and completing their degree / postgraduate studies. As regards to the length of military service, Antonis noted that:

‘On average, by the time a male graduate completes his first degree studies and military service and starts looking for his first job, he will be at least 24-25 years old or even 26-27 years old if he studied for a second degree. I believe that it is very difficult to start looking for your first job at this age’.

(Antonis, Male, Academic Professor)

It should be noted that during their military service male graduates do not receive any income from the government, and as a result, they are totally dependent on their families.

On a more general basis, a recent study carried out by Karakatsanis (2001), reveals that during the period between the completion of a graduate’s degree studies and his /

her transition to employment, the family environment operates as a protection mechanism against the negative consequences of unemployment. Normally it does this informally by using a number of 'stop-gap' measures, either by providing temporary employment for their offspring in the family business (and not declaring income), and / or covering their living expenses. As *Yiannis* explained:

'Family ties which still remain strong in Greece, provide protection to family members facing employment problems after graduating from their degree studies. As a result, atypical forms of employment amongst graduates are enhanced. In other words, many graduates who are unemployed seek work under the financial protection of their family or work in their family businesses and do not declare income, and / or are engaged in atypical forms of employment'.

(Yiannis, male, Graduate Recruitment Consultant)

Atypical forms of employment are quite dominant in Greece. A study conducted by INE/GSEE (2000) shows that the majority of newly engaged staff (55 per cent) is hired for jobs constituting atypical forms of employment; most of them seasonal and fixed-term work. Also, the high proportion of graduates in temporary jobs or fixed-term contracts is due to the fact that they cannot find a permanent job. According to *Konstantinos*, there are number of reasons for that:

'Low average earnings, high social insurance contributions and an extensive use of atypical employment in the informal economy'.

(Konstantinos, Male, Academic Professor)

Serafetinidis (2001) also supports this view noting that the widespread use of the informal economy in Greece is one of the most important reasons why many graduates prefer to register as unemployed while searching for a secure job and working in the informal market. Even though there is no reference of any past research conducted specifically for graduates, Serafetinidis' study (2001) tries to explore this issue in broad terms by examining the age group participation rate in the

unofficial economy. Thus, for those graduates under 25 years old the participation rate reaches 79.5 per cent while for the 26-35 age group the rate is 70.2 per cent. These findings support our academic professor's view in that:

'It is impossible to be a student (unless you continue for further studies) or raise a family without being involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in the 'paraoikonomia' [informal economy]'

(Konstantinos, Male, Academic Professor)

Thus, it is fair to say that the structure of the Greek labour market also operates as a financial protection mechanism against graduates' potential unemployment. Also as the next sub-section shows, there is an increasing tendency in Greece for graduates to stay or return in academia and continue for a further degree, which might be related, or not to their degree studies.

6.3.2. Further studies.

Upon completion of the first- degree studies certain graduates may choose to continue for further studies. Interview findings reveal that graduates from PSc & PA tend to continue for further studies in a different scientific area to their degree. On the other hand nursing graduates are less likely to continue for further studies. As *Katerina* observes, the majority of nursing graduates seem to be very confident with their theoretical and practical qualifications obtained from their degree studies and consequently feel quite satisfied with their professional career in nursing. However, it was noted that:

'Unfortunately, degree studies give nursing students only one professional orientation: to work in hospitals and health organisations. Moreover, our existing database shows that most of our nursing students did their placement in hospitals. Therefore, it is perfectly normal that they feel very confident of their practical skills, as they had the chance to develop them during their six months work placement in health care settings'.

(Katerina, Female, Career Advisor)

For nursing graduates, the decision to undertake further study depends on whether they would like to enhance their educational and career development and / or change their professional orientation. In this case, and as observed in the previous chapter, further studies were perceived as a way to obtain new and ‘saleable’ skills in the labour market.

‘If a nursing graduate decides to change his/her professional orientation and seek for a job in a business environment [excluding hospitals], it is likely that he or she will fail during the selection process. This is due to the fact that obtaining a nursing degree does not necessarily mean that a graduate attains the skills that could be effectively applied in a business organisation’.

(Katerina, Female, Career Advisor)

From the above, it is evident that there is insufficient information on the way companies operate and the kind of employees they would like to recruit. Therefore, the role of the career advisor becomes very important. As *Katerina* explains:

‘The role of the career advisor is to help graduates develop skills and obtain qualifications that would enhance their career prospects. He / she would also help them choose the most appropriate placement for them or assist their search for further studies in Greece and abroad’.

(Katerina, Female, Career Advisor)

In a very similar way, this is also the case for graduates from PSc & PA. To be more specific, these graduates have experienced the same difficulties in “selling” their qualifications and skills obtained from their academic studies in the potential employers. As *Theodosis*, the career advisor from Pantion University explains:

‘ People that choose to attend a postgraduate degree feel that their first degree studies are simply not enough to guarantee their succeed in their professional goals. They also believe that a further degree will enhance their professional chances. According to our database, graduates with one or two years of working experience, are more likely to request information from our office on postgraduate business studies in Greece or abroad. This is because they feel that the academic knowledge they have obtained is only for receiving and analysing new knowledge but it is not directly related to business in practice.

Therefore, they believe that a specialisation through a master's degree in business studies would enhance their career progression'.

(Theodosis, Male, Career Advisor)

Once again, it is evident that PSc & PA graduates have not taken into consideration or were not informed of the key competencies and social skills required by private-sector employers.

In brief, it is fair to say that a graduate's decision to continue for further studies rests upon the type of career that he / she wishes to pursue. Taking this issue into consideration the next subsection explores the correspondence between graduates' degree studies and their current jobs.

6.4 Employment mismatches and other factors influencing graduate employment in Greece.

This subsection focuses on two basic mismatches in the labour market. First, the relationship between the higher education system and labour market in Greece is considered. Second, the relationship between the knowledge and skills required by the economy and the ones provided by the higher education system are explored.

With regards to the factors influencing the phenomenon of graduate employability, both graduate consultants and career advisors report the interplay between supply and demand of a highly educated labour force as the most important factor shaping the employment of graduates within the Greek labour market. More specifically, research findings illustrate that there is a limited demand in the domestic economy for graduates. This is due to the fact that the base of the Greek economy consists of a large number of small companies (95 per cent, according to Pationiotis and

Stavroulakis, 1997) that cannot absorb the ever-increasing number of graduates. The poor economic performance of the country in the last decades has also been a deterrent factor in graduate employment¹. According to Kaminioti (1997), an element characterising the Greek economic structure is a considerable number of companies organised and run in the traditional way (as explained in Chapter Three). These companies try hard to survive intense competition not only in the domestic but also in the international market. As Patiniotis (2000) explains, the working conditions prevailing in these companies are quite often bad and their survival depends on the activity of the owner-manager and his family. Consequently, any expert knowledge that the employees may possess is of secondary importance to the smooth running of the company. As the recruitment consultant from Adecco commented:

‘Many Greek firms are unwilling to hire personnel with a tertiary education qualification. Most importantly there are a limited number of available positions in the labour market that can offer a proper career development to early entrants’ graduates².

(Yiannis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

This is in line with Liagouras *et al's* (2003) comments that Greece is probably the only country in the European Union with few large and “sophisticated” companies.

¹ The Greek economy experienced a deep recession between 1979 and 1994, with an average GDP growth of less than 1 per cent. Hence, the stabilisation policies implemented since 1990 to remedy the macroeconomic imbalances of the previous decade had a greater negative effect on the employment opportunities of young graduates (Liagouras *et al*, 2003).

² According to the Federation of Greek Industries (2001), the problem of unemployment is made even more difficult in Greece because the system of training and education cannot meet the needs and skills demanded in the current labour market. This is because most of the firms operating in Greece are family-owned small businesses (95 per cent). These types of firms fail to equip the labour force with the knowledge and skills demanded by the new technologies and the new organisation of the economy due to lack of resources..

The majority of Greek businesses, especially small and family firms, do not invest in the training of their employees. However, they still choose to recruit graduates that they know they cannot train. As *Fotis*, a recruitment consultant observes:

‘The increasing supply of graduates entering the labour market encourages employers to be very demanding in terms of qualifications and experience required from potential candidates. By recruiting such types of graduates, Greek firms expect to save money on training’.

(Fotis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

This is due to the fact that only few companies that can provide a graduate training scheme. Such companies are either multinational or large size Greek companies that mostly require graduates with business or technical backgrounds for junior managerial positions. However, it was noted that:

‘What is really important in Greece is that, there is a big turnover of middle and junior managers, due to the continuously declining economic environment. The most recent example had been stock exchange companies that have suffered due to a declining trend in the market. Other reasons for this tendency are the limited number of investments in Greece and the global economic downturn’.

(Konstantinos, male, academic professor)

In addition to the above factors, respondents also noted that there is a tendency among graduates to question the role and most importantly the value of some professions within the Greek labour market. For instance, a graduate felt that sales jobs, account clerks and secretarial positions were less desirable jobs for him/her to start his/her career. As *Yiannis* from Adecco explains:

‘Usually schools provide a theoretical professional orientation, which only leads to academic studies. Technical occupations are considered to be the choice of people that had failed in the national examinations. However, there is no excuse for not finding a job. If you read the job advertisements in the newspapers, you can easily identify which jobs are in higher demand (sales persons, account clerks, secretaries, unskilled jobs) or not’.

(Yiannis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

According to the professor of PSc & PA, the above perception is also shared by people graduating mostly from private colleges in Greece, or postgraduate degrees graduates who have studied abroad and felt overconfident about their qualifications and skills. *Kyriaki*, a Recruitment Specialist in Diageo, also added:

‘There are many graduates that have been awarded a master degree in social and political sciences but they refuse to start their professional career in a multinational company as trainees or administration staff. They prefer to remain unemployed instead of compromising their expectations and widening their career orientations’.

(*Kyriaki*, Female, Recruitment Specialist)

Thus, one of the main problems of graduate unemployment in Greece is due to the high expectations of early graduates regarding their future careers, their perceptions about the value of some professions and finally, their denial to become more atypical in their professional choices. The career advisor from Pantion University reported that:

‘Our database shows that most graduates are over qualified for the positions they are currently employed in. As a result they seem to get unsatisfactory salaries, work in undesirable conditions, have low job satisfaction and limited career prospects within the company’.

(*Theodosis*, Male, Career Advisor)

However, past research conducted in this area (*Patiniotis*, 2000) reveals that, Greek companies tend to refrain from hiring highly educated staff for two reasons the first one being the fact that graduates often demand high salaries in accordance with their qualifications. Second, university graduates are covered by a collective agreement which specifies that employers are obliged to pay higher salaries to university graduates than to less educated employees. When *Fotis* was asked to describe the criteria employers set when they are looking for new applicants he quoted:

‘Unfortunately, from personal experience, most employers require people who are willing to accept working long hours and with low salaries. That is why they prefer younger people without any qualifications. Most of the advertisements in the newspapers ask for secondary school graduates to perform employers’ low skills jobs’

(Fotis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

In this case, it is fair to say that under utilisation of graduates’ qualifications in some positions was seen as a graduate’s temporary strategy to overcome difficulties during the selection process. It was also seen as a consequence of the current trends in the graduate labour market: Indeed, as *Theodosis* observes:

‘Since the introduction of the Euro in Greece, the financial situation of the country has deteriorated. The average basic salary in Greece is 600 Euros compared to the average European salary of 1,100 Euros per month. The living expenses of a Greek citizen are comparable to those of a European one. I believe that Graduates are facing difficulties not only in finding a job but also getting a job with a respectable income. It is very difficult to find a ‘graduate job’ in Greece because this implies a graduate salary as well. Most of the Greek businesses in Greece are family owned and are struggling to survive the European competition. Therefore, graduate jobs with the definition, career and financial prospects, which are given in other European countries, are very difficult to find in Greece. Nowadays, a graduate has the same opportunities as a secondary school leaver’.

(Theodosis, Male, Career Advisor)

On a more general basis, it is worth noting that the value of qualifications changes over time as the supply of and the demand for them changes. The current situation in Greece implies that apart from professions requiring a high level of specialization (i.e. medical professions, IT technicians), a person can virtually take up any occupation, regardless of educational and training background or any other relevant qualifications (Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1997). Thus, the crux of the matter is this; there is no close link between education and occupation. As many graduates from PSc & PA commented, social and political studies do not have a specific professional

orientation. That explains the reason why the hetero-employment of graduates of this discipline is extremely high compared to vocational/ technical occupations, where a degree of specialisation is expected. However, both career advisors and recruitment consultants suggested that graduates' job expectations from this discipline were related to their perceptions of successful professions and careers. Thus, one of the main problems of graduate unemployment or misemployment in Greece is due to the high expectations of graduates regarding their future careers, their perceptions about the value of some professions and finally, their denial to become more atypical in their professional choices. *Kyriaki* also agreed in that:

'Most of the graduates are not realistic with employers' demands. They do not realise that if you would like to start your professional career you should start from a junior position. Professional experience has nothing to do with academic qualifications. In the university the professor delivers theoretical knowledge. Within work settings it is the manager's responsibility to show you how to perform your job tasks effectively. Even though graduates have the typical qualifications, they are not able to find a highly skilled job without work experience'.

(*Kyriaki*, female, Recruitment Specialist)

Dolton and Silles (2002) observe that the synchronisation between university qualifications and the labour market has an important bearing on the ability of graduates to enter graduate-level occupations and receive graduate-level earnings. With regards this point, some issues should be taken into consideration. The extent to which learned knowledge and degree skills can be transferred to the labour market varies markedly with the type of degree and the specialisation component of qualification. Different rates of misemployment or unemployment by no means imply the existence of serious mismatches between the specialities produced by universities and those required by the economy. According to the Observatory for the Transition in Labour Markets (1999), graduates of technological institutions have slightly better

employment opportunities than graduates of a 'general' academic degree. Thus, it is

Yiannis' belief that graduates have to be:

'Less demanding in salary given for one position. At the end of the day employers need people who are able to perform job tasks effectively. I do not believe that university degrees are essential in order to do that. People with many qualifications are more demanding in their job search and have higher expectations'.

(Yiannis, Male, Recruitment Consultant)

Hence, whatever the errors or deficiencies in the planning and implementation of the corresponding educational reforms, the basic problem seems to be the mismatch between the demand for and supply of highly educated workers in the Greek economy.

The individuals of this sub-sample were asked to comment on whether the level of education amongst graduates of the two disciplines were adequate to find a job related to their degrees. All respondents agreed that in Greece, graduate jobs, earnings and careers are totally subjective and there is not a clear definition of what constitutes a graduate job³. Commenting on this issue, the recruitment consultant from Adecco explained that:

'In some cases, there is a strong basis for objective judgment, for instance, in the case of a nurse with a Bachelor degree that works in a nursing profession in a health care organisation. This graduate clearly believes that his / her education corresponds to his / her employment. In other cases, however, the answer is totally subjective. For example, a PSc & PA graduate who works as an administrator officer in a public organisation is likely to report correspondence between his / her level of education and type of work. But, if you ask a graduate from the same department who works as an administrator officer in an insurance company he / she probably feels that his / her qualifications are under-utilised in the job he/she performs'.

(Yiannis, Male, Recruitment consultant)

³ As Patiniotis (1996a:7) explains, Greece lacks, as yet, a register of the occupations and professions that really exist and are practiced on the Greek labour market. Such a register would serve as a foundation for forging links between education and the economic field. However, the existing statistic register of Greek occupations and professions is a translation of the ISCO88 register of the ILO and is, obviously, inadequate for the purpose of achieving such links.

A key issue that emerges from the above statement is the dynamics of the 'massification' of higher education (UNESCO, 2002). It is evident that there are important differences among employment paths of young graduates. Science (especially social science) graduates have greater difficulty in entering the labour market and finding employment that corresponds to their academic qualifications than those of applied sciences (medical professions). The diminishing employment opportunities of PSc & PA graduates has forced them to remain unemployed or accept less qualified jobs and as a consequence displace less qualified graduates.

Following the above discussion, the fundamental problem in the Greek economy is not only the inability of educational institutions to meet the needs of a rapidly changing labour market, but also the inability of the Greek economy to keep pace with the increasing demand for higher education. In other words, the basic cause of unemployment among young graduates is the inability of the business sector to absorb them.

As far as the techniques that graduates use in their job-hunting are concerned, it was reported that on-line recruitment as well as the use of the career centres were the most significant ones. However, findings revealed that a quite common phenomenon in Greece is the inadequate use of both methods during graduate job-hunting. According to the discussion held with the consultants of the two job agencies, only 10 per cent of Greek graduates seek a job on-line. There was a dual reason for this; lack of Internet connection in most Greek households and lack of personal spare time for job hunting. Apart from that, university career services complained about the fact that only a small number of graduates registered with their career centre and were aware of the

facilities the centre could offer; for example written materials about interview techniques, effective job hunting, guidance for effective CVs and covering letters. As a career advisor reported:

‘Most graduates do not know how to ‘sell’ themselves during the interview. They could easily decline an invitation to attend an assessment centre in fear of failing. Greek graduates are not willing to put too much of their time and effort in order to get a job. They have the qualifications but not the skills required to find a job. We have so many jobs and placements in our database but so few graduates are aware of the services of an academic career centre and how to make any use of it ‘.

(Theodosis, Male, Career Advisor)

The above findings revealed that graduates do not invest much of their time and effort into job hunting and do not familiarise themselves with the use of contemporary recruitment methods. Therefore, not only are they unable to identify future employers but also they become less confident in applying for many attractive jobs. It is also evident that they lack IT skills that are required in a business environment.

According to our graduate recruitment consultants, another factor influencing graduate employability was geographical preferences. Looking at their database, graduates’ job-hunting was limited to their hometown. Therefore, graduates who were geographically atypical were more likely to find a suitable job than those who limited their job search in a specific geographical area. As reported from the interviews, working hours and location were some of the most important factors that influenced graduates’ decisions in their job hunting. According to *Aggeliki*:

‘I started my job search in Piraeus area, my geographical location. I was determined to look for a job in the wider area of Attica only if commuting was convenient to myself. I do not wish to spend all my day at work. My personal and social life is very important to me as well’.

(Aggeliki, Female, Nurse)

Location was also a very important criterion during the short-listing process, as

Kyriaki commented:

‘When so many candidates apply for a vacancy, some criteria should be set. One of them is geographical restriction. There had been so many interview cases where a candidate needed more than two hours for commuting. In the private sector, employees are expected to work overtime. Therefore, it is my company’s policy to select someone who needs a maximum of half an hour to commute’.

(*Kyriaki*, Female, Recruitment Specialist)

Geographical restriction during the graduate selection process seems to be a reasonable restriction from a recruitment consultant’s point of view due to the significant number of applications he / she receives for one vacancy. As a result, it is common practice for graduates to report their home address and the desirable geographical area of future employment when they register their CV on- line.

Finally, another factor influencing graduate employment is gender discrimination in job opportunities. In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in women entering paid employment⁴. Although many women still prefer the traditional role of housewife or working for the family business, a significant part of the female population in Greece is actively participating in the labour market. Indeed, as *Yfantopoulos*’ (2001) research shows, in the most recent years the number of working women has increased proportionally to the increase in the cost of living as modern households are in need of more than one income for their support. As *Kostantinos* explains:

⁴ According to data from the National Statistical Services in Greece (ESYE), the presence of women in the labour market has been steadily growing over the last five years (EPA, 2000). The proportion of the female labour force rose from 37.7 per cent in 1995 to 38.8 per in 2000, whereas the figure for men in the same period fell from 64.1 per cent to 62.2 per cent.

‘Up until recently, female employment was a choice and not something that women had to do in order to cover family needs. For instance, if the work created serious problems, such as the fact that there was none to take care of the children in the family, or the family needs were somehow covered, then the wife stopped working’.

(Konstatinos, Male, Academic Professor)

However, women with university education are the exception to this rule, as they tend to work throughout their married life (Mousourou, 1984). The interpretation that is provided for this phenomenon is that women with university education have larger participation rates in the labour market because they have larger opportunity costs, since they have been training for longer periods of time (Soumeli, 2000). Despite the increased presence of Greek women in the labour market, their quality of life appears to have deteriorated due to their difficulties of reconciling work and family life. Most noticeably, women with university education, who usually belong in high occupational categories, meet several obstacles in discontinuing their work during family formation years, when compared to women that are occupied in a lower occupational category and receive lower incomes (Symeonidou, 1995). According to research conducted by Symeonidou regarding motherhood and female employment in Greece, more than three thirds of working women ended their careers either when they got married or when they had their first child (Symeonidou, 1990). This is consistent with *Theodosis*’ explanation of this issue:

‘In the traditional Greek society, men do not contribute significantly to household work. As a result, the typical eight-hours working day creates problem for working mothers’.

(Theodosis, Male, Career Advisor)

One issue that emerges from the above is the interpersonal relations between the spouses and the allocation of the everyday responsibilities in the household. Results from this study also reveal that men still maintain the role of the ‘husband-provider’,

who hardly participates in the household work. However, as Maratou-Alibranti (1995) claims, husbands tend to participate a lot more in activities that are related to their children's rearing, although there is still an unequal distribution of the responsibility between the two spouses. As far as working women with higher education levels are concerned, in an attempt to combine their professional and family life they try to adjust the time spent caring for their children according to the age of their youngsters. In other words, motherhood and the age of the youngest child determines how many hours a working mother can spend in her professional career, her flexibility to adjust in time and location changes, such as overtime and change of shifts or travelling for business purposes.

'From my personal experience in this area, men or women without any family commitments usually hold key positions in their companies. This is due to the fact that working mothers with higher educational and social level do not just perform typical activities of the upbringing (cleaning, preparing meals etc), but spend more time on children's education and cultural cultivation. In my company women in key positions either have no children or have children old enough (15-16 years old) to look after themselves. Unfortunately there are no alternative career options for married women with children. In order to follow the company's developments and changes you have to be prepared to work hard and many times out of standard working hours. If you have any commitments this is very difficult. I have, for example to work 12 hours per day in average because I am single. When I decide to get married I will compromise my professional career for the sake of my family. This is the role of women in the society. To bring up their children and take a good care of their family'.

(Kyriaki, Female, Recruitment Specialist)

Theorists, such as Rubery and Fagan (1994), suggest that motherhood and in particular the age of the youngest child is the main obstacle for the active participation of women in paid employment, since women with pre-school aged children spend a significant amount of their time in childcare. Actually, *Kyriaki's* comment is well matched with the child-centred nature of the modern Greek family, where parents act

as private tutors of children in an attempt to help them succeed in the educational field (Maratou -Alibranti, 1995).

In summary, working women have a disadvantage to men in the Greek labour market, because they tend to have a more discontinuous employment pattern, which is associated with the family formation years. As Chapter Three reveals, the predominant type of family within the society and the social traditions and attitudes play a crucial role in the degree of the discontinuity in the employment patterns for women.

6.5 Summary.

In this chapter we examined the impact of various factors on graduates' pre and post degree choices and career activities. More specifically, it was shown that the academic orientation of Greek secondary schools, the lack of career teachers, as well as the ability of students to enter the department of their choice (after participation in the national exams), were perceived as very crucial factors in graduates' pre-degree choices. The influence from the family and the family's financial status also had an impact upon graduates' decisions to enter higher education in numerous ways.

One theme that emerged strongly within section 6.3 was the disparity in opportunities and resources among those embarking on different career activities after graduation. The key issue is that, different degree disciplines progress differently within the Greek labour market. However, this is not only a matter of degree studies and personal choices. The findings showed that there were also other factors influencing graduate employment such as the structure of the Greek labour market; the way

graduates' perceived their employment status; geographical preferences and job hunting techniques graduates used. The position of women within Greek society was also perceived as an important factor that impacted upon their employment opportunities.

Chapter Seven

Summary and Conclusions

Our empirical data have raised a number of important issues with regards to current trends in HE and graduate employment in Greece. This chapter briefly reviews our empirical findings and draws some broader conclusions from the study. Section 7.1 summarises the key findings of the research in terms of the factors that influenced students' degree choices and their career activities after graduation. Section 7.2 draws out the broader implications of the study for individuals' career choices, educational policy, and employers' recruitment strategies and practices. Section 7.3 concludes with recommendations of potential areas for future research.

7.1 Graduate employment in Greece: A brief summary

In the context of the expansion of HE across Europe, there is a widespread assumption by educational policy makers and some academics that an increase in the number of graduates is beneficial to individuals, employers and society alike. Our study questioned whether HE expansion is naturally beneficial to graduates by examining their expectations, decisions and outcomes as they were shaped by a country's environment, structure and culture.

By focusing on the career trajectories of graduates in one specific country (Greece), our study has developed a multi-level analysis of the dynamics of graduate employment and its constraints. A series of crucial issues are discussed in this study in order to enable the reader to understand the special feature of the Greek social reality (Pesmazoglou, 1985); that is, the regulation of formal tertiary education in the context of the economic and social restructuring of the country. Our findings

highlighted the various possible factors that impacted upon graduates' initial decisions for further studies. In this regard, the analysis has traced the historical evolution of the structure of HE in Greece and assessed the subtle interactions between HE structure and policies, and the Greek culture.

Our analysis showed that the abolition of secondary school exams created a large pool of general lyceum graduates who decided to sit for national exams in order to enter HE. Family also played an important role in students' initial decisions by supporting them financially and psychologically during their effort to enter tertiary education. The desire of Greek households for HE was also reinforced by the Greek society as a whole that perceived HE studies as a means for social and financial mobility. These two factors put pressure on the Greek state to respond accordingly by increasing the number of places in HE. However, our study challenged whether this political decision for the expansion of HE brought any benefits to individuals.

The study showed the difficulties graduates encountered during their transition from academia to employment. It could be argued that, in many respects, the Greek labour market structure is relatively uncondusive (and perhaps non-responsive) to graduate employment. There are still weak links between academic establishments and the operation of the labour market in Greece, as most small and family-owned Greek businesses are unable to absorb the increasing number of graduates. This phenomenon is also reinforced by the fact that the educational system has increased the number of HE places in specializations such as social sciences that are relatively of low demand in the labour market. The outcome of this situation is the increasing number of unemployed or hetero-employed graduates. The phenomenon of over-education and

hetero-employment is more intense to those people graduating from theoretical degree disciplines compared to those graduating from institutions with vocational and more specialised degree programmes. This was clearly demonstrated by the different post-graduate employment experiences of our nursing and PSc & PA graduates.

More specifically, empirical findings demonstrated that nursing graduates were more likely to find employment immediately after graduation. They were also very likely to be found in jobs related to their vocational nature of their degree studies. In contrast, this was not often the case for PSc & PA respondents. Graduates from this discipline were more likely to continue for further studies in order to attain skills that would make them more attractive to potential employers.

Family's financial support also played a very important role in shaping graduates' outcome by extending periods of unemployment, or atypical / temporary employment. This phenomenon had negative results on graduates' career outcomes as it encouraged employers to be more demanding in terms of qualifications and work experience. Indeed, our findings showed that most Greek employers were unwilling to provide any training or pay premiums to graduates. Therefore, the key message of our study is that, a degree itself cannot be of any value to graduates unless it is combined with skills and competencies in high demand.

On the whole, the empirical evidence presented in this study constitutes a meaningful enhancement in our knowledge of the dynamics of graduate employment in Greece. Its unique focus on the qualitative experiences of Greek graduates has allowed us to question the utility of the degree studies in the employment opportunities of those

graduates by teasing out the various factors shaping individual career trajectories. Drawing from this backdrop, the next section assesses the implications for individual career choices, educational policy and guidance and employers' recruitment strategies.

7.2 Graduate employment and policy implications

In broad terms, the current study challenged the widely held assumption that an expansion of the HE system is of universal benefit. This is an important key finding which should be of interest to policy makers.

7.2.1 Implications for individuals

There is growing evidence that the traditional graduate market is disappearing (Harvey, 1999). Our findings support this view by showing that there isn't a clear definition of what constitutes a graduate job and career. Yet, in Greece, a 'graduate job' is any job that a graduate does. Our interviews revealed the difficulties respondent graduates have experienced in finding jobs corresponded to their degree studies. Evidence from this study, also showed that there are doubts about whether the skills graduates acquired on HE programmes are those that employers required or were prepared to pay for. Therefore, there is clearly the need for graduates to be better informed about employers' needs – what employers are looking for-, if they hope to achieve the employment outcomes they aspire. In any event, graduates should realise that academic study is not the only way to professional success. More emphasis needs to be placed on vocational preparation and generic skills acquisition, from school years.

It is also recognized that students themselves need to take a more active role in their career development. Graduates need to be better informed about opportunities but they should also be aware of the limitations and the changing nature of graduate careers. It would appear that career centres services might be of particular benefit, over a longer term, to those graduates who are less clear about their options after graduation but may be more flexible in taking employment to give them the experience or opportunities required to enter the graduate labour market (Elias, 1999). Given the number of respondents embarking upon further study to enhance their career prospects, more extensive labour market information on postgraduate course outcomes would also appear to be crucial. The fact that graduates from social sciences undertake further studies would suggest that it is this group that feels the greatest need to bolster their employability by accruing additional qualifications.

Therefore, a key message for the individuals is that, the degree itself is not a guarantee for a job, let alone a career, and therefore other key skills and competencies will be of more value to them and their potential employers, during the recruitment process.

7.2.2 Implications for government and HE policy and practice

The entrance examination system to Greek HE is a continuous issue of national debate and criticism (Protopapas, 1999). Our study showed that a considerable proportion of general lyceum leavers wishing to enter tertiary education, attend private preparatory schools in order to become well prepared for the university admission exams. Therefore, the current examination process imposes a substantial cost for tutoring and preparation for the exams. On the whole, a key message is the

reconsideration of the efficiency of the university selection mechanism in favour of those students (and their families) who cannot afford the cost of HE studies.

More importantly, the relationship between education and employment, and school-to-work transitions has been a crucial issue within education and policy-related European literature over the last decade. There is a widespread assumption that the broad aim of HE- as part of a broader employability strategy- is to be a responsive provider of education in areas of skill shortages (Harvey, 1999). However, this assumption is more complex in reality. Findings from our study revealed that there is a weak link between education and employment. In other words, there is a mismatch between labour market requirements and the outputs of the educational system. Yet, this phenomenon is inadequate to explain why the number of students enrolling in HE in Greece continues to increase.

Some ambitious commentators in the area of graduate employment propose upgrading some HE courses to correspond to labour market needs so as to enhance the employability of graduates. Yet, this study challenges the above view whether the focus of HE should be a strong link between various degree programmes and labour market requirements. This is because there is a time lag between the demand for a profession and the time it takes to go through the HE system. It is evident that the role of the Greek State has been dominant in the functioning of the educational system. Yet, it has not been capable and flexible enough in order to respond quickly to local and international labour market needs (Kanellopoulos, 1996). In other words, the structure of the Greek educational system and especially the time lag- four or more

years for a Greek student to complete a degree course- are such that would not produce suitably qualified people quickly enough.

Also, the existing HE literature showed that there is a lack of cooperation and of mutual exchange of information between the educational system and the labour market regarding the qualities (knowledge, skills and competencies) that graduates attained during their university studies and those required in the labour market. A key message to educational policy-makers focuses on the overall aim of the HE provision that should be assessed based on the delivery of key-skills training. A special mention should be given to the development of graduates' critical learning that becomes increasingly necessary in an exceptionally mobile and changeable work environment.

7.2.3. Implications for employers

A key responsibility has to rest with employers themselves first, for solving any labour demands that they have, and second, to identify graduate capabilities and key skills and match them to their job requirements.

With regards to the first issue, the decision-making in the hiring process involves a match between graduate skills and the position available. Implications for future policies should not only give emphasis to the positive job characteristics but also to explore the negatives ones. Graduate expectations of their prospects, particularly in their first jobs, need to be realistic. As Brink (1992) suggests, employers need to take into consideration employees' perceptions for the job, to be honest about their company's shortcomings and the job's constraints. They should also discourage those

graduates who would not fit in their job requirements. Therefore a key message to employers is the identification of skills in demand (both generic and social).

Our study also revealed that some vacancies filled by respondent graduates did not require someone with a degree. Thus, an implication for future policy is the responsibility that employers have in identifying potential gaps between skills that meet their requirements and the ones HE provides. In other words, the key issue lays on the responsibility of employers to identify graduate skills and key competencies during their recruitment process and develop them to any possible extent. A key responsibility has to rest with employers themselves to utilise to the fullest the graduate potential through the provision of graduate programmes and other forms of training as well as encouraging and sponsoring graduates' further learning.

7.3 Recommendations for future research

Due to the influence of the Single European Market, some countries have modified their educational practices and further research may identify these changes. More specifically, future research should assess how the objectives of the Bologna Declaration – as it was described in Chapter One – are achieved within the different national contexts.

Successful educational practices in the local level should be recorded and internationally recognised and further applied in other European countries. In this regard, further research should also examine the extent to which European countries could influence each other. This may include the qualifications that future candidates require as well as the investments that European countries are ready to make in order

to collaborate efficiently with other countries in the era of European expansion and graduate mobility.

In an organisational context, it must be noted that organisations are not isolated from the wider economic, social and political environment in which they operate. Due to environmental changes it is difficult to determine the specific tasks required for the available graduate vacancies, which drive organisations into different strategic choices over time, and the kind of people required to correspond effectively to these changes. Bearing this in mind, common policies and standards in educational, employment and transferable skills (IT, languages) should be identified and further examined by taking into considerations local specific conditions and needs.

Bearing this in mind, regional differences in the relationship between HE and employment must be taken into consideration by any researcher who wants to explore the phenomenon of graduate employment across Europe. There are more frequent 'national' cultures in the relationships between higher education and the world of work. According to Teichler (1999), this is most obvious in the sphere of internationalisation of HE, because the systems of governance, funding and management still tend to be national while functions of higher education become more and more international. In this regard, future research should examine the positive or/and negative consequences regarding the impact of HE studies in graduate employment among different national and cultural environments. In this regard, it could be valuable to extend the present findings in the context of other European status studies.

Further research therefore could concentrate on regional differences regarding the role of the HE institutions within local labour markets. The relationship between higher education and employment and the type of higher education provided varies, in most respects, more substantially by country than by field of study. As our findings showed, academic institutions were perceived to have 'multi-purpose' functions which contribute to the generation, application and transmission of knowledge, provision of training, as well as to the social and economic development of the society. Future research should identify the cultural, sociological, and economical-political factors impacting upon the formation of the structure and more importantly the role of academic institutions within different national environments, labour markets and cultures.

In addition to this, the current study focused only on graduate perceptions regarding their career decisions and trajectories within the Greek labour market. Future research could examine the other side of the equation, which means employers' perceptions on graduate employment. Thus, an empirical research needs to be conducted within Greek firms. This kind of research would not only identify similarities and differences in employers' perceptions regarding the value of academic degrees, but also explain why these perceptions exist.

Still, graduates' career progression is partly depended on the philosophy and rationale of the employers. Bearing this in mind, future work should be of a more in-depth, qualitative variety. For example, with regards to the need of reconciling graduate supply and demands in rapidly changing world a very important question that Greek managers have to consider is: To what extent is cost a consideration in determining

the choice of human resources, particularly for small-to-medium size enterprises? Therefore, future empirical research is needed to investigate the extent to which Greek employers could utilise and further develop graduate skills and competencies within their firms.

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APPENDIX II (Graduate Questionnaire)

Graduate Employment in the Greek Labour Market

Survey of graduates in nursing and political science and public administration

Dear Graduate,

This questionnaire has been developed to explore the position of HE graduates within the Greek labour market. Its main aim is to investigate the extent to which graduates' expectations of the transition from education to employment and their career expectations, decisions and outcomes are shaped by specific national environments, structures and cultures. It is part of an academic research project conducted by a Ph.D. student of the Leeds University Business School.

I would be grateful if you would complete the questionnaire provided. **Any information you provide will NOT be reproduced, altered or sold to any organisation. The data collected will be treated with the strictest confidence and all respondents will remain anonymous.** Although co-operation with this study is purely voluntary, I do hope you will agree to take part, because your input will be used to assess the value of higher education studies in the Greek labour market.

Thank you very much for your kind support

Niki Kyriakidou

Doctoral Researcher

Should you have any questions concerning the research, or you wish to receive a summary of the key findings, please do not hesitate to contact me on:

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A: Initial Degree Choices Skill Development through Academic Studies

A1. Which year have you finished secondary education? _____

A2. Have you sit for national examinations?

Yes No (why) _____

If yes, how many times _____

A3. Have you set a career plan after graduating from secondary education?

Yes No

A4. To what extent the following factors influenced your decision to study for an academic degree?

(1: Not at all, 2: A little, 3: Moderately, 4: Much, 5: Very Much)

1.family preferences	1	2	3	4	5
2. social status	1	2	3	4	5
3. financial security/good income	1	2	3	4	5
4. career prospects/professional progression	1	2	3	4	5
5. job flexibility/mobility	1	2	3	4	5
6.others.pleae specify	1	2	3	4	5

A5. Determine to what extent the following factors influenced your choice of study?

(1: Not at all, 2: A little, 3: Moderately, 4: Much, 5: Very Much)

1.Relatives and others who have studied/work in the same or similar field	1	2	3	4	5
2. Relatives and others regardless their studies/jobs	1	2	3	4	5
3. Influence from school teachers/career advisers	1	2	3	4	5
4 Current labour market trends and jobs demand	1	2	3	4	5
5. Personal interests and inclination	1	2	3	4	5
6. No specific preference for the course (the outcome of the national examinations)	1	2	3	4	5
7. From other sources. Specify	1	2	3	4	5

A6. Did you have institutional preferences or geographical constraints for the choice of university/department ?

Yes No (please go to question A5)

If **YES** please specify:

A7. Which institution and department have you attended for your first degree?

Institution	Title Subject	Dates

A8. Have you undertaken any working experience (internship, work placement, etc) or seminars during your academic years?

Yes No (please go to question A7)

If **YES** please give details:

A9. What are your main skills obtained from your degree studies? (you may tick more than one)

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Practical/ on the job skills | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. IT skills | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Theoretical knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Writing projects/reports | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Organising/planning | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Team working | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Analysing/decision making | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Presenting | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Other. Please specify _____ | | | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B. Post Degree Decisions and Career Activities

B1. Could you please take a few moments to contemplate on how you would define the term "career" (i.e. what does a career mean to you), and please write it down in the space provided:

B2. Did you set a career plan after graduation?

Yes (please answer the following question) No (please go to question B4)

B3. What steps have you taken for your career development after graduation?

B4. Which of the following job search practices were used when you graduated from university/technological institution? (You may tick more than one)

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Newspaper Advertisements | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Careers Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Careers Offices | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Visits to Universities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Participation in Public Sector Competitions | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Employment agency | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Local companies | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Trade/Professional Unions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Personal Contacts | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Somewhere else. Where? _____ | | | |

B5. Please indicate which of the following best describes your activity following your graduation (you may tick more than one answers)

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Student | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Answer the section B5.1) |
| 2. Currently Employed | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Answer the section B5.2) |
| 3. Employed in the past and currently unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Answer the section B5.3) |
| 4. Unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| 5. Military Service | <input type="checkbox"/> | |

B5.1 OTHER STUDIES (SECOND DEGREE, MASTER, PH.D)

a. Please describe your further studies:

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Second Degree | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Answer the section I) |
| 2. Master/Diploma | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Answer the section II) |
| 3. Ph.D | <input type="checkbox"/> | (Answer the section III) |

I. SECOND DEGREE

Institution/Country	Degree Title	Have you been awarded the degree?
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

II. MASTER DEGREE

Institution/Country	Degree Title	Have you been awarded the degree?
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

Institution/Country	Degree Title	Have you been awarded the degree?
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

III. PH.D

Institution/Country	Degree Title	Have you been awarded the degree?
		Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

IF YOU HAVE STUDIED FOR A SECOND OR POSTGRADUATE DEGREE, IN THE SAME AREA WITH YOUR FIRST DEGREE SUBJECT, PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTION. IF NOT, ANSWER THE QUESTION C

b. Which the following factors influence your decision to continue in the same area with of your first degree subject? (you may tick more than one answers)

1. Unable to find a job only with my first degree
 2. Better career prospects
 3. Specialisation in my area of interest
 4. The prospects to find a permanent and stable job
 5. Other. Please specify
-

c. Which of the following factors influence your decision to specialise in a different area from your degree subject? (You may tick more than one answers)

1. Unable to find a job related to my first degree
 2. Career progression
 3. financial security/good income
 4. More choice of professions
 5. The prospects to find a permanent and stable job
 6. Other. Please specify
-

B5.2 CURRENTLY INTO EMPLOYMENT**A. In which sector are you working?**

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Private Sector | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Public Sector | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Local Government | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Self-Employed | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B. Could you describe the type of your employer? (i.e Retailers and wholesalers, Public security)

C. Which is your position? (please define your job title if it is possible)

D. Employment Status

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Temporary work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Contracting work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Permanent work | <input type="checkbox"/> |

E. Please define the period of time between your last and your current job

Years	Months
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

F. How many jobs have you done so far? _____**G. Please indicate to what extent your university knowledge and skills have been utilised to your current job**

Not at all , little , Moderate , Much , Very much

H. Is your current job related to your studies/qualifications?

Yes No

I. Since you joined the organisation, have you received any further training?

Yes (go to question K) No

J. If you have not received training, has this been because:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. None has been available? <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. You have not wished to undertake further training? <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Other (please specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> | |

K. What was the kind of the training that you received? (you may tick more than one)

- 1. Attended seminars, training courses, workshops
- 2. Doing training exercises, assignments, projects
- 3. Reading training books and/or manuals
- 4. Having training on the job
- 5. Other _____

L. Rank the following characteristics according to their importance to you (from 1 –not important to 5 –very important), when seeking a career job

1. Economic Benefits	
2. Promotional prospects	
3. Pension schemes and other benefits	
4. Job stability and security	
5. Prestige /social status	
6. Other. Please specify	

M. Does your organisation have a career development programme?

Yes No

B5.3 EMPLOYED IN THE PAST AND CURRENTLY UNEMPLOYED

B5.3.1 Please define different jobs you were occupied in the past:

A _____
 B _____
 F _____

B5.3.2 For how long have you been into employment;

Years Months

B5.3.3 For how long have you been unemployed?

Years Months

B5.3.4 Which of the following job search practices were used to find a job? (You may tick more than one answers)

- | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Newspaper Advertisements | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. Careers Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Careers Offices | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. Visits to Universities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Participation in Public Sector Competitions | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. Employment agency | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Local companies | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Trade/Professional Unions | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Internet | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Personal Contacts | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Somewhere else. Where? _____ | | | |

Section C: Family Commitments

C1. Title: Mr Mrs Ms Miss Dr

C2. Gender: Male Female Other (Please State) _____

C3. Age: _____

C4. Marital status: Single Married No longer married-separated, divorced or widowed living with a partner

IF YOU ARE MARRIED OR YOU HAVE A PARTNER PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

C5. Which is the job status of your partner?

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Full time employment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Part-time employment | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Self-Employed | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Unemployed | <input type="checkbox"/> |

C6. Are you or is your partner the main income earner in the household?

You are Your partner is Both

C7. Do you have any children? Yes No (go to question C8)

If yes how many? _____

C8. If you have children, how labour market structure or/and your company supports parent employees?

C9. Do you have any other dependants other than children?

Yes No

APPENDIX III

Career profiles of graduates from PSc & PA

Interview 1

Mary, age 29, female, single, living in Piraeus (in parent's house). She was unemployed for the first six months after graduation, because she was seeking a job related to her degree studies. Lack of working experience made her job-hunting very difficult. She worked for 6 months in an insurance company as a sales person and 1 year as a supervisor in a super market. In 2001 she found employment in an electrical retail store as an account clerk and had been working there since then.

Interview 2

Elena, age 28, female, married, living in Piraeus. After graduation she found a job immediately in an insurance company as an employee with general administration duties. In 1999 she had a horizontal transfer in the same company as a cashier employee. She was not satisfied with her career development, so she decided to apply for any vacant position in the public sector. In 2002 she got a position as an administration officer in a Local Government organisation.

Interview 3

George, age 31, male, married, living in Piraeus. After graduation he decided to continue for postgraduate studies (master and PhD) in the same department. In 2000 - during his military service- he was involved in teaching and academic research but he was unable to find an academic post in the department of PSc & PA. Through his personal connections he was offered a postgraduate programme manager position. In 2002, the department offered him a permanent post in the university administration as a public servant. He is married to *Elena* since 1999.

Interview 4

Dimitris, age 30, male, married, living in Athens. After completing his first degree he was involved in research activities in the department of PSc & PA. One year later he continued for a Master's degree in the same area. Then he did his military service and at the same time he worked as a research assistant in an institution and started his doctoral degree in the same department. In 2002, his PhD supervisor offered him a contracting position in the same institution as a research fellow.

Interview 5

Doukas, age 30, male, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). After graduation, he involved in research activities with the department of PSc & PA. In 1999 he decided to continue for postgraduate studies (Master's) in Government and Social Policy. In 2000 he started his doctoral degree in Administrative Science in the same department and started looking for a job in his area of studies with no success. He decided to do his military service and at the same time write up his thesis. In 2002

with his personal connections he found a job as a public servant in the Department of Health and Pension in Athens.

Interview 6

Marina, age 31, female, married (with 2 children), living in Piraeus. She decided to get married 3 months after graduating from the department of PSc & PA. Due to her husband's connections she was offered a position in the administration of his company. After she gave birth to her first son she tried to take exams for employment in the public sector with no success. Although she felt that there was not any career development within her company she continued working there because she knew that it was impossible to find a better job anywhere else in the private sector due to family commitments. During the time of the research she reported that she was quite satisfied with her job due to certain benefits her company offered to married employees (nursing school for children and flexi- time).

Interview 7

Kyriaki, age 42, female, divorced with 2 children, living in Athens. She started her degree studies in the department of PSc & PA in 1980 but gave up and decided to start her own family. After her divorce in 1988, she worked in the administration in a small retail organization in Athens for 5 years. Her employer took advantage of her financial situation and forced her to work overtime because he knew she was in great financial need. She decided to continue her first-degree studies in order to get more qualifications and find a better job. After her graduation (July, 1997), she found a fixed-term job in the public administration for 15 months through her political connections. After that, she searched in the newspaper advertisements and in September 2000 she started working in an accountancy assistant position in a retail company. In September 2003 she was promoted to the Account Manager.

Interview 8

Christos, age 30, male, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). His attendance in the department of PSc & PA was more the outcome of his national exams score rather than his degree choice. During his first-degree studies he worked as a project officer in the Local Government for 1 year. After his graduation in 1997 he could not find an appropriate job and decided to complete his military service (18 months). In 2000 he decided to change his professional orientation through a Master's degree in Economics and Finance in the UK. Unfortunately his family was unable to sponsor any further studies. He started working in his uncle's catering company for one year in order to gather the money for his Master's degree. Since September 2002 he found employment as a financial analyst in the General Bank of Greece.

Interview 9

Penelope, age 29, female, married, living in Athens. After graduating from the department of PSc & PA she spent one year job-hunting with no success. With her father's connections, she was employed as a secretary in a marine company in 1999. She was not career minded and felt satisfied with her job. She believed that with her

degree qualifications was very difficult to find employment in the private sector. One and a half years ago she got married to *Dimitris*.

Interview 10

Stella, age 29, female, single, living in Piraeus (in parent's' house). After graduating from the department of PSc & PA she worked for two years as a sales assistant and since 2000 she has been employed in an insurance company in the customer service department. She did not have any career inspirations, although she complained that she was not satisfied with her salary and work responsibilities at the time of the study.

Interview 11

John, age 30, male, single, living in Athens (in parent's' house). The choice of attending the department of PSc & PA was based on his family inspirations for prestigious professional career and respectable income. After graduation he realised that it was very difficult to find any related to his studies job. He remained unemployed for one year and then he decided to join the army for 18 months. In 2000, he attended an accountancy course in a private college and he started working in his father's business as an account clerk. He was also unofficially employed on a part-time basis in 2002 as an account clerk.

Interview 12

Kyriaki, age 28, female, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). She was not interested in her first-degree studies. She admitted that her decision to attend this specific course was based on her score in the national exams. When she graduated from the department of PSc & PA she decided to change her professional orientation and attend an MBA in the UK. Her family was very willing to sponsor her studies. In 2001 her father 'helped' her find employment in Diageo as a human resource assistant. While working in this post she trained to become a recruitment specialist. In 2002 she was awarded the best employee prize for her performance within her company. She was very pleased with her professional career at the time of the study.

Career Profiles of nursing graduates

Interview 13

George, age 30, male, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). After his graduation he sat for exams so as to attend the medical school of Athens but he failed. In 1999 he decided to continue for postgraduate studies in Health Economics because he wanted to change his professional orientation. He was working for 3 years in a social health project in the institution of social policy under the supervision of one professor from his Master's programme. In 2001 he started his PhD in the same field with the supervision of the same professor. At the same time he was employed as a teaching assistant in the university. However, he was not satisfied neither with his income or career progression within the university. He decided to find another job through job agencies. He worked for two months as a project manager in a big private hospital and from September 2002 until the time of the study had been employed as a senior consultant in a big health consultancy company.

Interview 14

Aggeliki, age 28, female, living with her partner in Piraeus. After her graduation, she started looking for a job immediately. She asked her cousin who worked in a job agency to prepare her CV and she helped her find a job in a local private hospital as a nurse. In the meantime she had applied for a position in the public sector. In 2001, she was offered a position in the department of health. She felt very pleased with her professional career, because she got a permanent job in a public organisation with many benefits for working mothers. She was planning to get married in September 2003.

Interview 15

George, age 31, male, married with two children, living in Piraeus. After his graduation from the nursing department he found a job immediately in a private clinic (which was run by a big insurance company) and worked as a nurse since then. He got married to *Marina*.

Interview 16

Margarita, age 30, female, married (one child), living in Athens. While she was studying in the nursing department she got an internship in a public hospital. After graduating from the nursing department she used all her existing contacts in the same hospital and manage to get a job there. At the same time she applied for positions in both Athens and Giannena (her locality) public hospitals with no success. In 2001, she was promoted to the position of senior nurse.

Interview 17

Charis, age 30, male, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). After his graduation from the nursing department, he attended IT seminars and studied for a foreign language for one year. At the same time he submitted an application form to the

municipality of Athens for employment in the public sector with no success. In 1999 he found a job as a nurse in a private clinic through newspaper advertisement. In 2001 he was employed in the private sector and started his specialisation as a theatre nurse since then.

Interview 18

Anastasia, age 29, female, married, living in Athens. Since the first day of her attendance in the nursing department she realised that nursing was all she wanted to do. She was the best student, so after her graduation from the Athens Technological Institution he was awarded an entry in the nursing department in the University of Athens without exams. She accepted the award because she was very keen to enhance her knowledge in nursing. At the same time she started working in a private clinic on a part time basis. While she was studying for the second degree she got married and in 2001 gave birth to her daughter. In September 2002 she was promoted to a senior nurse in the same hospital. At the same time, she applied for a nursing job in the public sector. She was very satisfied with her professional life at the time of the study.

Interview 19

Marina, age 30, female, single (living in Athens). After graduation she applied for a job in the public sector, and had been waiting for two years to be employed in a public hospital in Athens. During that time she was staying in her parent's house looking for other jobs. In 2000, she was offered a job in a private clinic in her locality but she rejected the offer because she felt that salaries and working conditions in the private sector were not as good when compared to the public sector.

Interview 20

Kostas, age 30, male, married with two children. After graduation he attended a course for teaching qualifications and one year later he worked as a lecturer in a vocational school for practical nurses. At the same time he applied for a position in the public sector because he believed that the benefits were better for working parents. He had been waiting for two years to find his job (at the time of the study) in a public hospital. During his waiting period, he was working as a nurse in a private clinic.

Interview 21

Maria, age 28, female, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). After graduation she worked for three years in the same hospital where she had previously done her six months internship. While she was there, she applied for a position in a public hospital and decided to take national exams for entering in the same department in the University of Athens. In 2001 she was employed in a public hospital with very good salary and career prospects.

Interview 22

Petroula, age 28, female, single, living in Athens (in parent's house). After completing secondary education she studied practical nursing in a vocational school and did her apprenticeship in a private clinic. She felt that she did not have any career

prospects as a practical nurse so in September 1997 she decided to take exams for the nursing department in the technological Institution of Athens. In 2001 she was employed in a private clinic as a graduate nurse. At the same time she applied for a position in the public sector. In September 2002, she found employment in a public hospital.