
AS-LEVEL HISTORY

Component 7041/2L
Report on the Examination

Specification 7041
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Component 7041/2L

Italy and Fascism, c1900–1945

Component 2L: The crisis of Liberal Italy and the Rise of Mussolini, c1900–1926

General Comments

It is good to see so many students engaging with the content and concepts of this paper. Whilst the change in specification brought new challenges, the essential truths remain the same. Students with a secure understanding of the concepts underlying the course, a secure grasp of the chronology and who most successfully tackle the actual question asked will gain the most marks.

The attention of centres is drawn to the focus paragraph at the start of the specification and the general introduction to component two (depth study) set out in the advisory scheme of work. The source question now makes very different demands of the students than previously was the case, particularly in the requirement to evaluate sources in context and assess the contribution of particular sources to historical understanding. Similarly there is a requirement to understand the processes of change through reflection on the interaction between different factors.

A common weakness in scripts was a tendency to describe provenance without relating it to the value of the source as evidence for the purpose outlined in the question. A weakness in the essay questions was to catalogue different factors which weakened or strengthened Italy in 1900, or which consolidated the Fascist dictatorship, without seeing the way the factors interrelated. In this depth study, more attention needs to be given by centres to the period before 1914 which is, of course, the addition in the new specification to the related legacy paper.

Section A

Question 1

The vast majority of students were able to write at length in response to these sources. Many made sensible deductions about the veracity of the comments based on the provenance given and demonstrated the ability to link this judgement to comments on the source content, evaluated through contextual knowledge. Source B tended to be less well understood than Source A, for example the reference to Giolitti 'managing' elections in 1913. Many students seemed to know the term 'trasformismo' but had a hazy appreciation of what it meant in practice and so did not recognise Salvemini's reference.

Regarding provenance and tone, insightful comments were made from the perspective of 1945, based on a general awareness that the Fascist regime had ended. The exaggerated tone of Croce was recognised, and Salvemini was often credited with offering a more balanced account. The weaker answers tended to see provenance in isolation from content and context. A description of why the provenance is 'strong', followed by a matching list of why the provenance is 'weak' does not convince. Nor does the assertion that the source 'will be biased', especially when the student is unable to challenge any source content through their own knowledge. Indeed it was not uncommon to be told that Source A was exaggerated followed by corroboration of the points made without any indication of what exactly was 'exaggerated'.

Weaker scripts offered little contextual awareness linked to the source, which was often accompanied by a descriptive approach to provenance and tone. Students who were able to offer knowledge explicitly to challenge or support information given in the sources were rewarded appropriately, especially if their analysis was reflected in their overall judgment. The strongest scripts showed historical understanding by seeing the value of the sources as more than just a question about the reliability of the information given, for example by ‘reading between the lines’. Croce’s fond and nostalgic recollections of democracy in Italy before 1922 seem oblivious to the fact that this ‘rapid ascent towards democracy’ would collapse so rapidly into dictatorship.

In a significant number of cases the examiners sensed that students had left themselves insufficient time to answer the essay question.

Section B

Question 02

The question on the divisions in Italy in 1900 proved the less popular of the essay choices. The specification begins in c1900 so valid material could be used from the legacy of unification, the attempts by the liberal elite to develop a more inclusive state, from Crispi to Giolitti, the weaknesses of the political system (‘trasformismo’), foreign policy, the economic divide and the backwardness of the south, ‘legal’ and ‘real’ Italy, and the ongoing resentment of the Catholic Church. Most students showed awareness of these issues which weakened Italy as a nation and were able to offer some specific support. Those who scored the highest marks went further and used the development of the suffrage, the social reforms, or the developing economy, as examples of Italy’s growing cohesion.

Question 03

Students were generally well prepared for a question on the consolidation of the dictatorship in Italy to 1926. The majority were able to show some understanding of the role of violence and intimidation and also offer alternative explanations. Most commonly the legal changes, the collaboration with elites and the foreign policy successes were offered as counter-arguments. Weaker answers tended to be descriptive, making little or no direct comment on the question asked, or offered only general support. Better scripts offered precise support which was relevant to the time period. Little credit could be given for general statements about propaganda with reference to radio and cinema, which would be more applicable in the 1930s.

A common weakness was insecure understanding and limited comment on the given factor, violence and intimidation. There was also a tendency to view the different factors in isolation and not pay regard to their interrelationships. An example of this would be the role of intimidation of deputies in securing of legislation such as the Acerbo Law. The passage of this act was also helped by Mussolini’s conciliation of the Pope with proposals on religious education in schools amongst other things. The PPI, who had a lot to lose by the Acerbo Act, eventually abstained. Stronger students were able to link their knowledge of factors to the establishment of dictatorship. Some failed to show an adequate appreciation of chronology. It was noted that the ‘Fascist Laws’ of 1925–1926 tended to be overlooked.

Another weakness of answers was an insecure understanding of the impact of the Matteotti Crisis on Mussolini’s ‘dual track’ policy in that Mussolini was forced to choose between ‘normalising’ policies and dictatorship.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.