
A-level History

7042/2L Italy and Fascism, c1900–1945
Report on the Examination

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General Comments

It is pleasing to report on the positive engagement of the students with this new specification at A-level. All were able to engage at some level with the primary sources on Mussolini's foreign policy and showed knowledge of the issues raised in the essay questions. There were some very impressive answers on pre-war Italy, the consolidation of the fascist regime and fascist economic policy. Centres have got to grips with the key features, issues and concepts of this specification and students understood the need to offer a balanced argument.

There is need for further consolidation of the compulsory sources question. It was clear that some students were more adept in grasping the source as a whole, rather than in its constituent parts. They used their contextual knowledge to assess not just the content of the source but also its nature, purpose and origin, or provenance. Those students who were familiar with the nature and type of source they might encounter in this component were more able to identify what the historian may learn from the source.

Centres are reminded that there is no requirement at this level to compare the sources in question 1. Students should deal with each source separately, making a judgement on the particular contribution that the source can make within the broader study specified. They should be encouraged to ask the question 'what can this source tell us?' as specifically as possible. All sources are valuable, the question is 'for what?'

The demands of the essay questions are better understood. I would remind centres that this is a depth paper and the essay requires specific knowledge and focus, as detailed in the specification. A feature this year was an array of statistical information which was used very impressively at times, for example to illustrate Italy's unpreparedness for war or the economic divide in Liberal Italy. However, there was a tendency in some cases to use statistics to replace rather than support the argument, leading to a more descriptive answer.

Question 1

The three sources were considered separately. Some students offered a general introduction which was not necessary. Each source has an equal weighting in the final assessment so should ideally be given equal time. A significant number of students concluded with a comparative analysis of value. Credit was given for pertinent points about individual sources but not for the comparison as it is not asked for. All students showed some comprehension of the source content. Many students recognised the independent perspective that John Gunther offers of Mussolini's foreign policy in 1936 and supported or challenged his views with reference to Abyssinia, Hitler's rearmament and the Stresa Front. A common approach was to paraphrase Gunther's argument; more effective were the students who selected particular points for emphasis, for example the role of personality. The date of the source was often seen as a weakness, but more effective answers recognised that the view of Mussolini in 1936 was valuable as evidence of how he was perceived before he became involved with Hitler. Some struggled with the idea that Mussolini appeared 'strikingly intelligent'. There persists a stock evaluation of journalists as untrustworthy and sensationalist.

Knowledge of the context of the Spanish Civil War was a relative weakness in this question. Encouragingly, many students recognised the propaganda nature of source B and displayed a healthy scepticism. Better answers went further and identified what the source could tell us, for example the ideological aims of fascist foreign policy. Students who were aware that many of the

Italian troops in Spain were conscripts and not volunteers were able to make good use of that context to evaluate both content and provenance.

The value of Mussolini's own words in his Berlin speech (source C) was recognised. Students noted that he wasn't necessarily speaking the truth and used their knowledge of the events of 1937-40 to illustrate this. Stronger answers recognised the euphemistic nature of the speech and deduced Mussolini's purpose, seeing Mussolini as desperate for a German alliance. This identification of purpose showed good understanding of the value of the source in understanding Mussolini's diplomatic strategy in the late 1930s.

Question 2

Students were able to engage in a discussion of the political and economic condition of Italy before the First World War. Answers showed balance. Better answers were evident by their ability to focus on 1914 rather than offer a more general survey of Italy from the Risorgimento onwards. These longer-term issues remained but it was important that the answer made the link to 1914 explicit. Understanding of the Giolitti system was evident, particularly in the contradictory nature of his support and the challenge from socialists and nationalists. Weaker answers tended to see this system as a 'coalition' and had the mistaken belief that a Catholic political party had been formed pre-war. Conceptual understanding was shown by linking the features of Italy in 1914, for example the links between economic development and political stability or instability.

Question 3

This was the most popular question. The consolidation of the fascist regime is a familiar topic. Weaker answers tended not to offer enough discussion of the given factor, propaganda. Better answers combined their awareness of a range of issues, including the role of the elites and the use of violence, with a developed discussion of the role of propaganda through the media, posters and speeches, the Cult of the Duce and the propaganda value of the Lateran Treaty. It was also pleasing to see students use all the time period given, 1922-29. More effective answers offered an argument with carefully selected factual support and avoided excessive description of particular events.

Question 4

This was the least popular option. Students were familiar with the failure of fascist economic policy to prepare Italy for war and could give precise evidence of their unpreparedness in, for example, weaponry and food supplies. A smaller number of answers showed how the war itself caused further economic problems, or argued that all economies were under strain in war. Otherwise balance was found by questioning the 'complete failure' assumption in the question. The economic costs of pre-war foreign adventures were cited as evidence that the economic weaknesses were already evident. A small number of answers interpreted the 'strains of war' very generally and sought to explain Italy's military failures in World War Two, thereby losing focus.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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