



A-LEVEL HISTORY

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

7042
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General Comments

The entry this year showed a rise in the general standard of the answers, particularly in the sources question. It is always heartening to see the motivation and commitment demonstrated by students of a range of abilities, and answers of real thought and insight were seen. Many scripts were of considerable length and there were fewer narrative answers. It is still the case that time spent in planning is never wasted. There were times where more thought beforehand might have led to shorter and more focused answers. This is particularly true of question 1. This question does make great demands of the students, and it is understandable that they get on with it with some speed. However, as the sources are all on the same topic, it might be beneficial to read all the sources through first, if that is not done already although this might be too challenging for some students.

The sources were accessible to the students in terms of comprehension and the context of education policy was generally well known. Source C proved to be the more difficult, which may be a reflection of its more philosophical nature but may also be due to it being the third of the sources. Students should be advised to allocate their time as equally as possible to the three sources within the 60 minute period. The key to success in this question, for which many more high quality answers were seen this year, lies in bringing together the three elements: the content of the source; its provenance; and the historical context known to the student. This can perhaps be most effectively illustrated by Source A. Many good responses were seen which combined a clear understanding of what the source was about (the teaching of the March on Rome and the Cult of the Duce), with a secure grasp of the provenance (that the source was part of a series of compulsory texts) and an awareness of the context (which could include the knowledge that the content taught did not reflect the actual events of 1922 and so was evidence of the way in which the Fascist state used teaching as propaganda.) Some students were able to go further and point to possible weaknesses of this source, for example that it was a textbook and not necessarily telling us how the material was used, or that it relied on the role and enthusiasm of the teacher, which perhaps could not be guaranteed.

It must be stressed that there was not, and could never be, a set way of responding to source questions although the vast majority of students assess one source and then move on to the next. What was rewarded was a thoughtful response to the issue which applied sensibly the information which is given about the provenance to an understanding of what the source is saying, within a secure context. It is an assessment of value linked to a particular enquiry, so the focus must be kept in mind. It is now well understood that the answer should consider the strengths and weaknesses or limitations of the source in this assessment. It is in this area that the level of understanding of the source, provenance and context is revealed. It is not a requirement for the highest levels than this understanding is shown equally across all sources, given the demanding nature of the assessment task.

The responses to the essay question varied in their command of detail and ability to focus on the issue given. Each question had a 'given factor', namely the weakness of the Italian economy in 1900, the compromises made by Mussolini as he consolidated power in 1922-26, and the significance of the failure of the military campaigns to Mussolini's loss of support in 1940-1943. In order to demonstrate a good understanding of the question, this element must be given some consideration. It is effective to make the given issue the focus of the question, though it is becoming common for it to appear in the middle of a list of possible factors related to the question. Weaker answers were eager to move the discussion onto other factors with which they felt more

secure. The answers with a prepared response on, say, Italy's problems in 1900, or Mussolini's consolidation of power, were effective to the degree in which they applied the answer to the given factor. Very strong answers were not only able to deal with the given issue of the question but also relate it to other relevant issues by exploiting the links between them. This often led to well substantiated judgements.

Question 1

The sources were on the issue of education in Fascist Italy in the 1930s. The majority of students got off to a good start with source A. Perhaps they were already familiar with sources of this type. Nearly all were able to recognise this as an example of education used as propaganda, although the better answers used their knowledge of the context alongside the provenance of the source to show exactly how it was propaganda. A weakness in some answers was to focus their answer more on the nature of the March on Rome than the topic of education. A feature of very good assessments of this source was the number of points of value that could be drawn, from the age of the children, the subject matter and the role of education to support wider social rituals. It was also recognised that the source represented an 'ideal' lesson promoted by the Fascist state, and not necessarily what went on in the classroom.

Source B was understood, particularly in the idea that teachers would 'go along' with the regime for their own reasons rather than through a commitment to Fascism. Some weaker answers overlooked the provenance detail about the political background of the author. Those that recognised this and suggested that it might be 'exaggerated' were not always able to challenge the source content from their contextual understanding. Good answers recognised the critical tone adopted by Finer, particularly the reference to being 'netted', or 'caught outside' in line 12. Relevant contextual knowledge used in answers on this source included the Fascist Teacher Associations and the oath of loyalty.

Source C proved the more difficult for the students to assess. Successful points were made about the respective roles of boys and girls in education and Fascist society, and the importance of physical and military training. Good answers did take note of the date of this charter and made successful links to the radicalisation of society in the later 1930s and the impending military situation. This gave material with which to assess the weaknesses of this source, as it reflected what the state wanted rather than what Italian children were experiencing. It was relevant, in this context, to mention the battle for births and the university ambitions of women. Occasionally the answers strayed into a discussion of social issues and lost the focus on education.

A large majority of students were able to address this question with success. They were able to draw information from each source and say why the provenance of the source, supported by contextual understanding, made this information valuable. Those that could go further, for example by giving a balanced assessment of the sources in regard to value and possible limitations, or to make inferences or draw deductions from the sources, were rewarded with the higher levels.

Question 2

This was the least popular question, but only by a narrow margin. Students showed a good knowledge of the economic situation of Italy in 1900, and supporting material was accepted from the period up to 1914. This was balanced with good awareness of other issues, especially the

north-south divided, the political instability and the religious divisions. Balance was also achieved in some cases by the argument that many of Italy's economic weaknesses, whilst they were acknowledged as significant, were being dealt with through economic development in the north. Better answers related their knowledge of the economy explicitly to the issue of 'a weakness' rather than just offering a description of problems facing the economy. This analytical approach was at its strongest when it made links between different aspects of Italian society and political life in an attempt to establish a hierarchy of significance. The economy was most frequently linked to the problems of the north-south divide and the political weaknesses of trasformismo.

Question 3

This was the most popular question. The consolidation of power is a very popular topic and the period 1922-1926 is well known for the most part. Some weaker answer did have a poor focus on the time period, however. The challenge of this question, which was met by many students, was to identify the specific compromises made by Mussolini and to explain their impacts. The most frequently identified 'compromises' were the appointment of de Stefani, the tax policies towards big business, the acceptance of the monarchy and the policies towards the Roman Catholic Church. There is a lot of enthusiasm for writing about Mussolini's use of violence, and other balancing factors offered were the legality of the laws passed and the weakness of the opposition. A feature of the very strongest answers was the understanding shown of the links between these issues, which included the argument that another of Mussolini's compromises was the limitations he imposed on the Fascist radicals and Fascist violence.

Question 4

The given factor of military failures in 1940-1943 proved the more difficult for the students to support and this question was the least successfully answered. Even so, this was marginal and there were some very good answers at the top end. A common weakness of the answers was to give only cursory attention to the military campaigns and a failure to link these to the issue of support for Mussolini in Italy. As balancing factors, the economy and the impact of rationing was well known, as was the lack of support for the war in 1940. Mussolini's leadership during the war and the failure of wartime propaganda was less well covered, for example the absence of Mussolini from public view due to illness. The strongest answers demonstrated a secure knowledge of the chronology of the war and drew links between the experience of war abroad and the domestic situation, particularly as it reached the crisis of 1943.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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